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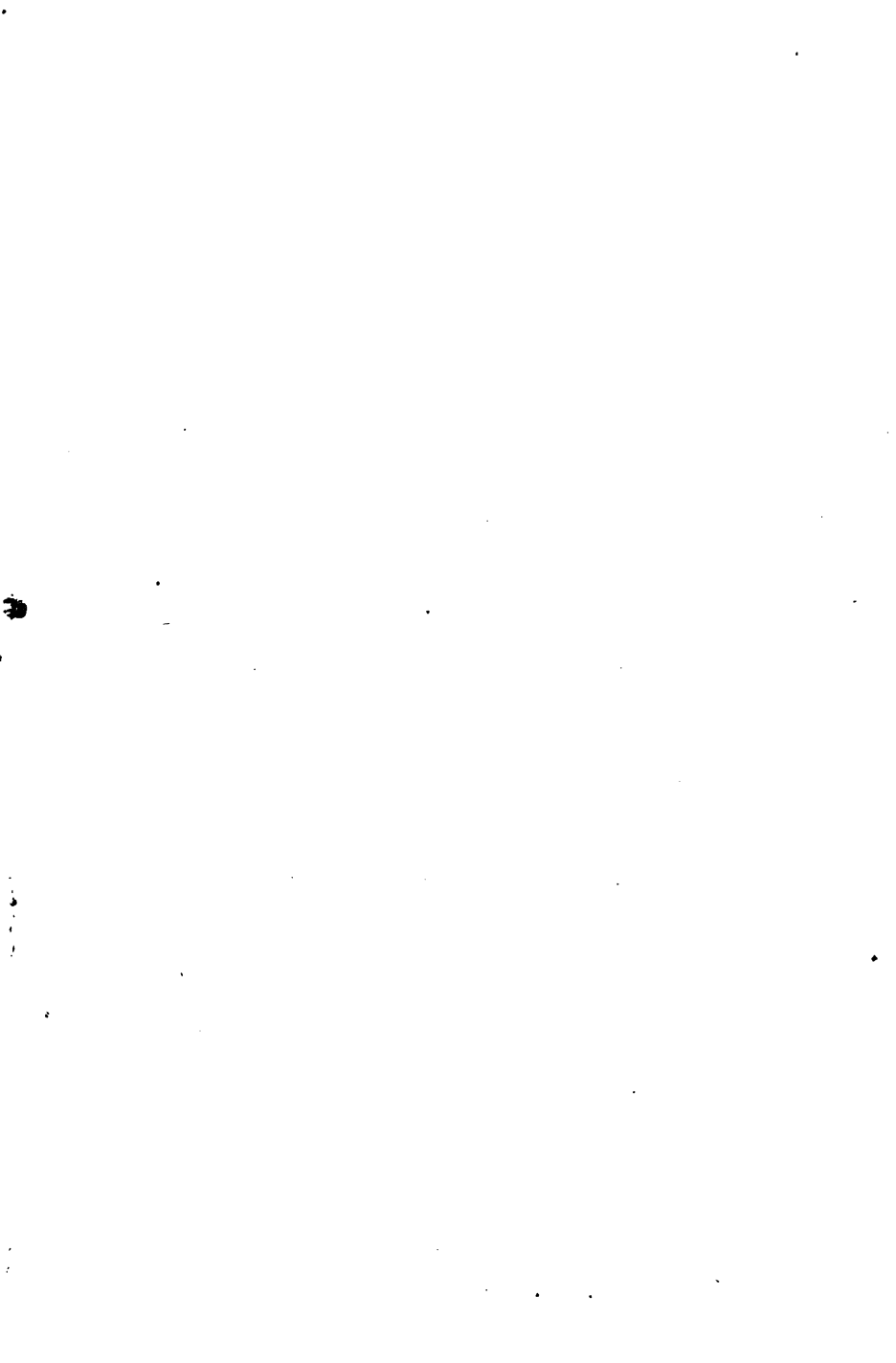
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BEATRICE CENCI.

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL
OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

BY

F. D. GUERRAZZI.

TRANSLATED BY CHARLES ALEX. SCOTT.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE historian has no more noble task than that of lightening or altogether effacing the stains from certain characters, whose names have been handed down to posterity loaded with unmerited obloquy.

The unfortunate Beatrice Cenci is chiefly known to the British public by the celebrated portrait in the Barberini palace at Rome, and by the terrific drama of Percy Bysshe Shelley, who represented her as guilty of parricide.

The perusal of the following narrative, based on historical documents discovered in the memorable 1848, will correct this erroneous impression and vindicate her name.

Considerable liberties have been taken with the original Italian—in the retrenchment of certain redundancies of style; in the omission of many pages, by which the progress of the story appears unnecessarily retarded; and, above all, in the modification of certain horrors little adapted to our country or civilisation.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that the reader will find compensation in the deepening interest of the narrative, and in the pathos of the heart-rending catastrophe.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

EARNESTLY RECOMMENDED BY THE TRANSLATOR TO
HIS READERS.

*"Amoroso ti versa a raccontare
Questa storia di Pianto, o Pianto mio."*

ANFOSSI.

WHEN first I saw the original portrait of Beatrice Cenci, attributed to Guido, I was so deeply impressed by the purity of her brow, the softness of her eyes, and the placid tranquillity of her heavenly countenance, that I asked myself, Can so angelical a form contain the soul of a demon? If the Creator mirrors His own image in the beauty of created beings by bestowing such sweet expression in conjunction with such perversion of intellect, would He not contradict Himself? The primeval sages and the sophists of Greece argued that the Deity speaks in the language of the beautiful. I know that our frozen age looks upon such doctrines as dreams descending from heaven like the roses of Aurora. Let the frozen age adhere to its theories of cold materialism, but leave us our spiritual images; let it maintain its inexorable arguments, but leave us the charm of all the beautiful that palpitates in creation.

What have you substituted for those divine dreams, O

men of arid hearts? The truth, you say? Be it so; but is the doctrine you thus dissect for us all the truth? is it eternal, necessary, invincible? or is it not rather conventional and mutable? O ye of the rising generation whom I now address! tender leaves of a tree struck, but not withered by lightning, may heaven grant you to believe steadfastly in the good and in the beautiful! They are like thoughts twin-born from the immortal mind; two sparks radiating from the same focus of His infinite bounty; two vibrations emanating from the same chord of His eternal lyre to make creation harmonize.

Stimulated by such reflections I began to search the records of former ages; to read the accusation and the defence; to compare recitals, manuscripts, and memoirs; I opened ancient tombs and interrogated their ashes, (for even ashes can speak if properly interrogated,) and came to the conclusion that this history was penned by men wearing the purple (popes and cardinals), who falsified and perverted facts, menacing with the terrors of the inquisition those conscientious men who would have dragged the truth before the light of day. I discerned the stains of blood which had been crying for vengeance in the face of God since the days of Abel—alas! too often in vain. The mass believes in guilt when the axe strikes; but I discovered the true cause of that execution, and was driven to regard it as a murder unique in the annals of the world.

Then Beatrice appeared to me hallowed by misfortune, and from the depth of my heart I thus invoked her forlorn shade:—

“ Arise, unhappy one, from thy grave of infamy ; reveal what thou hast been—an angel of martyrdom. Too long has the world’s cruel injustice been permitted to sully thy innocent but severed head. And since it has been vouchsafed to me to learn the truth, inspire me with sufficient talent to narrate thy frightful case worthily to those dear daughters of Italy who still love thee like a sister, a sister just departed from their sweet society, although the shadow of two centuries and a half enshrouds thy tomb.”

Assuredly this is a tale of atrocious crimes ; still it will be read by the maidens of my native land. It will pierce their gentle hearts ; but still they will read it. When the youth they love approaches they will blush and hurry to conceal it. Nevertheless, they will read it, and bestow on it the sole offering in their power—the tribute of their tears. And why should they not read it ? Is it because it is a tale of crimes and sorrows ? The web of this world is woven with threads of iron ; the gleams of virtue sparkle before us like burning embers thrown into a darksome abyss. Oppose a bold front to misfortune, for a certain time yet it will sit at your hearths—it will mingle tears with your wine. You will be happy only when you cease weeping. It may be that the tears and blood poured out on the parched soil of our unhappy country shall be destined to bring forth good fruit ; for, alas ! such nurture does the tree of liberty require before it bursts into bloom.

“ Virtue struggling with adversity,” said Socrates, “ is a spectacle worthy of the gods.”

Reared myself in that school, to me the wretched are

sacred. Misery rocked my cradle, misfortune nourished my childhood with bitter milk ; but misfortune girded my loins also with that perseverance that enabled me to begin this recital in a dungeon, and to finish it in chains. Let the world remember this well : when patriotism is registered in the code as a capital crime, then tyranny overwhelms mankind like a second deluge.

GUERRAZZI.

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BEATRICE CENCI.

CHAPTER I.

FRANCESCO CENCI.

"Per tutti i cerchi dello inferno oscuro
Spirto non vidi, in Dio tanto superbo."

DANTE.

A GROUP as beautiful as Raphael's celebrated Madonna della Seggiola sat in the ante-room of Count Francesco Cenci's palace. It was composed of a woman who had seen some twenty summers ; in her lap reposed a child, whilst a young man of noble countenance stood over them, tenderly contemplating mother and son, and raising his clasped hands as if in gratitude for the great blessing which heaven had bestowed upon him. The child looked like a stray cherub that had lost its way in wandering back to paradise.

A man, who might have served Michael Angelo for a model in some of his magnificent conceptions, lay stretched on a bench, concealing his face under a large conical hat. His beard was long, grey, and much dishevelled, and his

skin was of that leaden hue of which Jeremiah speaks when he describes the children of Sion :—

“ Ash-coloured as the floor of an oven.”

A large cloak enveloped his person, and his feet were encased in coarse sandals, according to the custom of the inhabitants of the Campagna of Rome.

He was well armed, but concealed his weapons carefully from sight, in consequence of the severe laws enacted by the late Pope Sixtus Quintus.

Two young noblemen were walking up and down in close conversation. The face of one of them was spotted with red marks, apparently the result of some cutaneous disease. Dark eyes gleamed from under his black eyebrows with an expression of ferocity and mental perturbation.

His hair was short and straight, his teeth black and soiled, and his nose was flat as that of a mastiff. His dress, though splendid in itself, was much disordered.

Restless and nervous gesticulations betrayed a disposition to evil deeds. Crime lay buried there like a smouldering volcano.

The other afforded a strong contrast to his companion. He looked pale and gentle ; his attire was also splendid, but not marred by negligence. His words, like his looks, were mild, timid, and melancholy. He appeared abstracted, and sighed repeatedly. A glance would have sufficed to discover that he was a prey to the pangs of a first love.

Besides the persons whom we have attempted to describe

there was a priest moving about like a magpie, and taking the greatest pains in the world to attract the attention of somebody. He spoke of summer and winter, of heat and cold, of sowing and of reaping; but nobody would listen to him. He asked repeatedly whether he could have the extreme honour of speaking to his Excellency the Count, at what time the Count was in the habit of getting up, and at what hour the noble Count would deign to grant audiences. It was all breath thrown away—nobody would listen to him. The married pair appeared completely immersed in their happiness; the peasant was as impassive as a statue; the young man with the spotted face cast a withering glance at him, which made him tremble; whilst the pale-faced youth stared at him as though he had been the man from the moon. The poor priest did not know what to do. Every now and then he opened his breviary, and looked at it as if he had swallowed some bitter medicine. He could not comprehend why nobody would mind him. He certainly ought to have attracted attention, were it only for his threadbare frock that hung so loosely on his emaciated body. Both had seen better days, and both had been long and intimately acquainted with each other.

The curate (for such he was) had by this time discovered his forlorn situation, and addressed himself for the third or the fourth time to a lackey, who was about to favour him with a reply, when the gentleman with the repulsive countenance called out, "Camillo, come hither."

It is the nature of menials always to obey those who command most imperiously; so Camillo, the lackey, left the priest abruptly, and replied meekly,—

“Eccellenza!”

“Has the noble Count passed a bad night?”

“I do not know, my lord; but I fancy not, as several letters from Spain were delivered to the Count early in the morning.”

Just then a tremendous barking was heard, the doors flew open, and a dog of enormous size burst in, looking frightened, wild, and ferocious.

In less time than one could say “Amen” the peasant sprang to his feet, threw off his cloak, and, brandishing a large dagger, prepared for battle.

The young mother pressed her child to her breast, and covered it with both her arms, whilst the father placed himself before them like an *Ægis* to protect them.

The gentlemen stepped on one side with that sort of dignified hurry assumed by those who are too proud to show any fear, and yet too prudent uselessly to face any danger.

As for the curate, he ran away.

The dog, following his natural instinct, flew after the fugitive, seized the end of his gabardine, tore it to pieces, and would have done worse had not two lackeys grasped the brute by the collar.

At that moment an elderly man appeared at the threshold. It was Francesco Cenci, a descendant of the

very old Latin family of Cincia, counting amongst his ancestors Pope John X., the celebrated lover of the fair and notorious Theodora, who had succeeded in obtaining for him first the bishopric of Bologna, then that of Ravenna, and finally the Papal chair.

History relates that Marotia, Theodora's sister, in her envious desire to deprive the lovers of the dominion of Rome, treacherously obtained possession of the Castle of St. Angelo (the ancient Adrian Mole), invaded the Lateran with a host of ruffians, killed Peter, the Pope's brother, and threw the Pontiff himself into a prison, where he died of poison.

Tradition affirms that his ghost appeared to Theodora at night, and superstition inculcates the belief that he was strangled by the devil as a punishment for his sins.

At all events, his death was as ignominious as his life was infamous.

His descendant, Francesco Cenci, possessed a considerable fortune. His income was estimated at more than 100,000 scudi, an immense sum in those days, and not a small one even in our own.

His father had been treasurer under Pius V., whose great zeal to purge the world of heresy afforded old Cenci ample opportunities of relieving the treasury of all its superfluous scudi. They were both perfect in their respective callings.

Of the present Count Cenci few people knew what to think. There never was a man, perhaps, respecting whom

so many contradictory reports were in circulation. Some regarded him as a pious, liberal, and kind man; others, on the contrary, considered him to be avaricious, cruel, and treacherous. Facts could be adduced in support of either opinion. He had sustained several criminal prosecutions, but always got off *ex capite innocentia*.

There certainly were many on whom those verdicts had no effect, as it was generally whispered that the ecclesiastical courts of Rome would never condemn a man who could show a rent roll of 100,000 scudi.

Though mysterious to the public, his character was awfully clear to his miserable family, who dared not utter a syllable, partly out of fear, and partly from a sense of decorum. They knew but too well how he devised and executed the most diabolical schemes—how those which most outraged public opinion were the most pleasing to him, such as homicide, violation, and incendiarism.

His audacity went so far as to keep an exact account of his outlay in crime. He kept a register, where the following items were found:—

“Paid for the adventure of Toscanella, 3000 ducats—very cheap.

“Ditto for the hire of three Sicari at Terni, 2000 ducats—a complete robbery.”

He always travelled on horseback. When one horse was exhausted he would alight to buy another: if his offers were refused he would take it by force, and settle the account with his dagger. He had no fear of banditti,

frequently traversing the woods of St. Germano or of Faiola alone, and even travelling without escort from Rome to Naples.

Wherever he appeared, rape, fire, murder, or some dreadful calamity was sure to mark his course.

His constitution was strong. Skilful in all manly exercises, he would often provoke his enemies by outrage or insult; but few men were bold enough to face him openly. He always kept a number of bravi in his pay, who found an infamous asylum in the court of his palace.

Amongst the ferocious Roman barons of that period he was the most ferocious.

Sixtus V., the late Pope, one day invited the Orsini, Colonna, Savelli, and Cenci, with many more of the most illustrious nobles of Rome, to the Vatican. After having entertained them for some time he approached a window of that elevated building, and said to them, "Either my eyes are growing dim with age, or else I fancy I perceive some strange ornaments dangling about your palaces this morning. Go and see, gentlemen, and be pleased to let me know whether this be an ocular delusion of mine."

They discovered numerous bodies of their banditti hanging from the battlements of their mansions.

Through this and other similar acts of severity Francesco Cenci had understood the character of the Pope, and during his reign considered it more prudent to reside at the Rocca Petrella, commonly called Rocca Ribalda.

On the election of Clement VIII. he returned to Rome. Though advanced in years his general health was good, only suffering at times from lameness, occasioned by a slight wound in the leg. Gifted with eloquence, he would have obtained celebrity as an orator had the times admitted it. There was something sinister in his extraordinary countenance, inspiring his own family with suspicion and fear instead of respect and love. His expression was deep and mysterious, like that of the Sphinx, or somewhat like his own reputation. But enough has been said at present of his person and habits; future pages will throw more light on the psychology of this portentous character.

The Count had retired early the preceding night, without saluting his wife and children.

On reaching his chamber he said to Marzio, his valet, who offered his ordinary services,—

“You may go, Marzio; Nero will do.”

Nero was a dog of enormous size and ferocity. His master had given him that name less in memory of that atrocious emperor than to indicate, in the ancient language of the Samnites, robust and strong.

Scarcely had he laid himself on his bed when he began to turn and groan.

Nero howled in concert. Suddenly the Count jumped from his couch and exclaimed, “The sheets are poisoned! Such things have happened—I have read it somewhere. Olympia, you have escaped me, but I shall overtake you yet. What mean this profound silence and tranquillity

around me? Are they all asleep? Do they not fear me? What ho, Marzio!"

The valet returned.

"Where are all my family?"

"They are asleep, Eccellenza."

"And dare they sleep when I cannot? Go and ascertain if they are really asleep; listen at the doors and lock them, particularly Virgilio's. I abominate Virgilio more than all the others," soliloquised the Count. "Under that impassive softness rush the waters of rebellion. He is a serpent without a sting, but not without venom."

Marzio returned and said, "They are all asleep, Eccellenza, but Don Virgilio's repose seems disturbed. I heard his feverish breathing. Still I contrived to lock the doors without being detected."

"Tis well. Now take this arquebuse, fire it close to Virgilio's door, and then shout with all your might and main, 'Fire! murder!' Thus will I teach them to sleep when I am awake."

"Eccellenza, the boy appears in the last extremity—the whole neighbourhood will be disturbed."

Cenci looked his valet full in the face, thrust his hand under the pillow, from whence he drew a pistol, and, pointing it suddenly at him, he continued with apparent calmness,—

"Marzio, if in future, instead of obeying, you presume to contradict me, I shall kill you as I would kill a dog. Go, obey!"

Marzio lost no time in executing his master's commands.

The terror of the women and the boy at being thus roused from their slumbers can scarcely be described. They leaped from their beds, rushed against their doors, but finding them locked, they screamed out of the windows. All in vain; nobody came to their assistance to relieve them from their frightful situation. On Marzio's return the Count asked,—

“How long will it be before the day breaks?”

“About an hour,” replied Marzio.

“An hour!” exclaimed Cenci. “An hour is a century, an eternity to the man who cannot sleep. Sleep they say befriends the saints. Were that the case I ought to sleep like the Seven Sleepers. What can we do now? Ah! we will spend the rest of the night in some meritorious work; we will train Nero.”

So saying, he ordered Marzio to fetch a man of straw kept for that purpose; then dragging Nero towards it, he began to excite and exasperate the animal, and then launched him against the image. The brute, blind with fury and rage, rushed upon the figure and tore it to atoms, to the great delight of his master.

“This is the child of my heart,” said he to Marzio. “Thus do I teach him to defend me against my friends, but, above all, against my beloved children, and against my still more beloved wife; and even somewhat against you, my very faithful Marzio.”

He then returned to his bed to seek repose, after having

filled his house with terror. On awaking he exclaimed, "Marzio, I have slept ill. I dreamt that I was at supper with my ancestors, an indication of approaching death. But before I join them at that meal many of my family shall go to prepare the table for me."

"These letters, Eccellenza," observed Marzio, "have just arrived from Naples by a special courier, and here are also some from Spain."

As the Count, followed by Nero, reached his studio to peruse his correspondence, a magnificent autumnal sun began to pierce and to colour the hemisphere with its brilliant rays. Alas! the only blessing that barbarians have left to our poor Italy!

Oh, merciful Father! great indeed must be our sins, and great thy wrath, since no tears, no sacrifice, and no bloodshed have power to cultivate on our soil the sacred plant of liberty.

"Marzio," said the Count, pointing at the majestic luminary, "could the sun be extinguished by a puff, would you extinguish it?"

"Eccellenza, I should let it burn."

"And I should blow it out," retorted Cenci.

Caligula wished that the Roman people had but one head, that he might sever it with one stroke.

Cenci wished to extinguish the sun. Presumptuous worms! Were the sun but to approach us the ashes of our earth would not leave even a trace in the infinite void.

CHAPTER II.

THE AUDIENCE.

—“Tutta la Caina
 Potrai cercar, et non troverai Ombra
 Degna più di esser messo in Gelatina.”

DANTE.

AFTER having delivered the letters Marzio requested the gentleman with the repulsive countenance to enter the studio. The Count received him with stately courtesy, and said, “Welcome, prince! In what way can we be useful to your Highness?”

“Count, I wish to consult you about some family matters, but there is one too many here.”

Marzio bowed and retired. The prince followed him to convince himself that the door was safely closed.

Cenci looked much surprised at such a precaution, and offered a chair. The youth then opened the conversation thus: “Count, I shall follow the example of Catiline, who began his oration *ex abrupto*; therefore I will tell you at once that I came to consult you on matters of import. I trust to find you friendly. My infamous mother disgraces my name by her conduct. Your name suffers also, in

consequence of the relationship between our families. Age has not withered her passions, and, despite her advancing years, she still grovels in degrading sensuality. She squanders on base-born lovers the immense wealth bequeathed to her by the imbecility of my father. I have become the derision and the mockery of all Rome. Whenever I appear in public I am ridiculed and outraged. Wherever I go I find the finger of scorn pointed at me—it makes my blood boil. The evil has reached such a height that it defies all remedies, excepting But tell me first what am I to do?”

“What!” asked Cenci in apparent astonishment, “the noble Donna Costanza Sta. Croce? Prince, I can hardly understand you. If you are joking with me I should recommend you to select a subject of a less delicate nature; but if you are in earnest, why then I must admonish you, my child, not to allow yourself to be tempted by the fiend, who, as the father of all evil, disturbs our minds with false impressions and”

“Count,” interrupted the young man, “let us leave the devil alone. I can prove all that I have stated. Listen. She abandons me to poverty, while she lavishes her princely revenues on paramours—low valets and their despicable families, who cluster about the palace like limpets on a rock. Of me she will not hear—of me, you understand, Count, who would have but little heeded her misconduct, had she behaved like a worthy mother to a deserving son. But that you may know the worst at once, she has

turned me out of the house, out of my own palace, the mansion of my illustrious ancestors."

"And is that all?" asked Cenci.

"Is that nothing?" replied the prince.

"It were, perhaps, overstepping the bounds of prudence, my dear young friend, to tell you that I have long perceived the sentiments of Donna Costanza for you. May heaven forgive her! but she has a sort of aversion for you. It is but a week since she spoke of you to me."

"Indeed! And what said she?"

"To inflame evil passions is not the act of a Christian, therefore I shall be silent," replied Cenci.

"By this time, Count, your words have kindled a flame which may produce a conflagration."

"Well, I may reveal to you, without any breach of confidence, that which may prevent much evil from happening, so I will tell you. The last time I saw her she declared, in the presence of several eminent prelates and Roman nobles, that you were an abominable liar and spendthrift, squandering away all her fortune. Moreover, she said that you had borrowed large sums of the Jews, giving as a security the palace of your ancestors, and that she had been obliged to release the mortgage to avoid expulsion. She also stated that you were a desperate gambler, and that there was no wickedness before which you would recoil; that your disgraceful conduct had nearly broken her motherly heart, and that she had no alternative but to apply to his Holiness to have you incarcerated."

"My mother," ejaculated the prince, boiling with frenzy, "imprison me?"

"Ay, and for ever," continued Cenci. "She said that she owed no less to the memory of her late husband, to the great name she bore, to her noble relatives, to her conscience, and to her God."

"Oh, my excellent mother! But tell me, Count, what said the prelates to this?"

"The precept of the Bible, my dear prince—'The tree that beareth not good fruit, let it be cut down'—was benignantly cited by these holy men."

"Count, if such be her intents, time presses indeed. Suggest some device, as I am at a loss how to act. You see that I am driven to desperation."

Cenci shook his head, and replied gravely, "The fountain of all mercy flows in Rome, and you can fill buckets from the spring. Imprimis, you can apply to Monsignor Taverna, or, if you have much money at your disposal and little sense, you may address yourself to our great lawyer, Prospero Farinaccio, who will swallow up both your capital and interest."

"Why, my dear Count, I have no money."

"Without money, prince, you might as well appeal to the colossi of Monte Cavallo."

"But even had I money the matter would become public, and I seek for silent and speedy remedies."

"In that case you must prostrate yourself at the feet of the holy father."

"Maladetto Aldobrandino!" exclaimed the prince; "he is like the wolf of Dante—

'Che dopo il pasto ha più fame di pria.'

Rather than appeal to him I would throw myself head foremost into the Tiber."

The Count's sardonic sneer found vent in the following bitter words: "On reflection I admit that you would lose your time. After having committed the egregious fault of protecting my rebellious daughter Olympia against me, the Pope will have become more cautious before listening again to the complaints of children against their parents. Paternal authority is the basis of all absolute power: the one cannot be infringed without affecting the other. The father and the king are never in the wrong; sons and subjects are never in the right. They live because their father begot them, and because the king allows them to live. How can they have the audacity to complain? Remember Isaac and Iphigenia—they were examples of true filial submission. Abraham, Agamemnon, and Jephtha, all show the power of paternal authority. Rome was great as long as the father had unlimited right over the lives of his family. Look at the twelve tables, and see how the patriarchal system is represented there. That was the golden age of Rome when a father could sell his sons. Don Paolo, you have courage and resolution: say, what are your plans?"

The prince replied, "You are known to be a man

endowed with prudence and discretion; you are known, likewise, to possess the art of removing those who stand in your way; you are experienced in botanical science; you know the potent effects of certain herbs, which expedite people to the other world without leaving any traces behind."

"I admit," murmured Cenci, "the marvellous power of certain herbs, but see not how they can serve you."

"For that matter, Count, I must inform you that my mother is in the habit of taking a certain potion every night to facilitate her sleep, and that the whole question resolves itself into the means of rendering her sleep eternal."

"*Misericordia Domine super nos!*" exclaimed the Count; "a paricide! An excellent beginning, per Bacco! Wretched young man! of what are you thinking? '*Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam.*' No sophistry can controvert words which were spoken on Mount Sinai."

"As for thinking about it, Count, rest assured that I have thought about it a thousand times. I am no novice, and can take oath . . ."

"I believe you without an oath," interrupted the old man. "Come hither, and let us reason together. The art of preparing poisons flourishes not as of old. Many of the most extraordinary mixtures known to our ancestors are lost to us for ever. The Medici of Florence deeply investigated that branch of science, but with comparatively small result. There was the famous *acqua Tophana*, for instance, which was ill adapted for any prudent operation, as it

caused the hair and nails to fall off, the teeth to decay, the skin to peel away, and the whole body to become so covered with foul ulcers as to leave manifold traces of guilt. Pope Alexander VI., of blessed memory, certainly made frequent use of it; but despots can afford to disregard any marks that may be left behind. I take my hat off with great reverence to Alessandro Magno. The Gordian knot is severed at one stroke with a sword. What traces does the sword leave behind? There was once a king, Edward II. by name, whose intestines were burned at Berkeley Castle with a hot poker. He died without leaving any visible trace of the cause of death. A curious invention, in faith. The removal of Donna Costanza by some such similar process would need concealment. You, on the contrary, might avow yourself to be the author of her death."

"Count, you are joking."

"Not I; I speak in right good earnest. Have you ever read history? I know that you have. Then why not take advantage of your experience? Do you remember the threat of Tarquinius to Lucretia? He declared to her that unless she submitted to his lust he would kill her on the spot. Place a murdered menial by Donna Costanza's side, and proclaim to the world that, having detected her in so shameful an adultery, you could not help vindicating the majesty of the laws and the honour of your name. The notoriety of her vices will justify the act. There must be some clause in our law books which will exculpate you."

"But," objected the prince, much embarrassed, "I am not aware whether she takes her lovers to her own apartment."

"Whither else can she take them?"

"True, Don Francesco; but to surprise them when together seems almost impossible."

"What! are not wolves caught in traps?"

"Yes, but I will not risk doing things thus openly, even if I were certain of success."

"Say rather," retorted Cenci, with a malicious smile, "say rather that you have invented paramours for a woman of sixty on purpose to palliate your own misdeeds. Say that you are instigated by the desire to become possessed of her fortune. I cannot blame you for it, because I know how young men become encumbered with debts. I only blame you for having attempted to impose upon an old man like myself."

"Count, upon my honour I swear"

"Swear not at all: either I do believe you or I do not. Oaths always appear to me like props about old buildings—they are sure signs of decay. I do not believe you without an oath, and still less with one."

"Do not abandon me, Don Francesco," said the young villain, much dejected.

Thereupon Cenci put his hand upon Don Paolo's shoulder and said, "I remember once having read of a case somewhat similar to your own, in which the following excellent measures were adopted:—A ladder,

reaching exactly to the balcony of the bedroom of the person or persons who were to be killed, was placed against the wall of the palace during the night. Money, jewels, trinkets, and other valuables were abstracted, to make the world believe that the murder had been perpetrated for the sake of plunder. By those means was suspicion averted from the person who inherited the victim's vast property, and the heir obtained a great reputation for piety by giving orders for a magnificent funeral, and by paying largely for innumerable masses. Nor did he stop there, but, wishing to be considered a rigid vindicator of his family, he importuned the magistrates daily, and instigated them to make very minute researches, blaming them for neglect, and offering a reward of two thousand ducats to any one giving information which might lead to the conviction of the murderer."

The prince struck his forehead and exclaimed, "Count, you really are a great man. I shall be devoted to you for life. This is the best course after all. One more favour, my dear Count: you must spare me some of those brave fellows whom you employ in similar transactions."

"To what transactions and to what fellows do you allude? The heap lies in your way, and you must find the shovel to remove it. Take care, Don Paolo, you stumble not over it. Remember we are supposed to have never met or conversed on this subject, and we must never meet again. I wash my hands of it like Pontius Pilate. Farewell, Don Paolo; I will remember you in my orisons."

After escorting him courteously to the door Cenci soliloquised thus :—

“ And do people maintain still that I am not useful to my neighbours ? The calumniators ! How is it possible to do more than I do ? Let us calculate a little how many people will be benefited by this affair. Imprimis, the grave-diggers ; then the priests, a class to whom I bear such tender affections ; also the poet who composes the elegy ; then the preacher of the funeral sermon ; then Maestro Alessandro, the hangman ; and, finally, Satan, if such a personage there be.”

CHAPTER III.

THE ADDITION.

When the young woman was ushered into the presence of the duke, she found him whose pallid brow we have seen as a declaration of war from the mirror, entered the room as if he were mechanically, scarcely heeding the entrance of the visitor who should be seated, and, looking contemptuously at the seat on a chair, he resumed a long and silent survey of the ceiling.

"The duke is dead," said the duke's wife, "and now is it not enough for you to have him to be unhappy?"

"Dead," said the duke.

"You are quite right while he is dead," said the duke's wife, "but what of your soul and body? You are so well adapted to the easier passion as yourself? Alas! perhaps, but the snow of age is on my head, and I can do no more. Heaven and earth suggest love to you, and nature breathes it with you. Petronia sings

—

Lo qu'io parlo, Petronia, e non è più
E tu, Petronia, e non è più
Tua anima parlo con me, e non è più

Now, young man, this is not a matter to be afflicted

about. Love is preached from our very pulpits. Petrarca, a grave man and a priest, was not ashamed to confess how love was burning within him for twenty years while Laura was alive, and for ten years after her flight to heaven. Mercy on me, that was a love to melt a stone! He was never tired of singing about his love in a thousand different rhymes:—

‘In numero più spesso, in stil più rare.’

Santa Teresa, you see, was pardoned because she had much loved—some say too much. She expressed her compassion for Satan simply because he could not love. Love, then, my boy; love *totis viribus*, as otherwise you would offend nature, and nature you know is the first-born of Providence.”

The youth covered his face with both his hands, again sighed heavily, and exclaimed,—

“Alas! mine is an unfortunate love.”

“Say not so, my young friend; there is hope for all. Unburden yourself to me. You love the wife of another, perchance? Should that be the case you would meet with a disagreeable impediment or two—first the husband, and then the decalogue.”

“O no, dear Count, mine is a lawful love.”

“Then marry her *in facie ecclesie*, and do not come and”

“Heaven knows I would do so; but alas, alas! so great a blessing is not in store for me.”

“Then do not marry her and be”

"Oh! the lady I adore is of humble origin, but her lovely form and the elevation of her mind make her worthy of an empire :—

'Alma real dignissima d'impero.'

I feel that I shall love her eternally."

"And how long do you calculate this eternity to last, duke? I will tell you. According to the most correct accounts in women it lasts an entire week, in some rare cases a little longer, but not much."

The young man blushed with shame on perceiving the sarcastic mockery of Cenci's words and manners, and said,—

"Count, you do me wrong. I was in hopes of obtaining counsel, but I see I am mistaken. Pray forgive me."

He was going to leave, when Cenci stopped him, saying, with much apparent benignity,—

"Duke, be pleased to listen. I only spoke to you thus on purpose to sound you. I now perceive but too clearly that a violent, perhaps a fatal flame devours your peace of mind. Confide in me; I can assist you perhaps. '*Haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco*,' as Dido said to *Æneas*, who left Troy on purpose to found Rome for the great glory of Popes in general, and Clement VIII. in particular."

In spite of his sarcastic language the Count looked grave when he requested his young friend to proceed in his confession.

"She lives in the palace of the Falconieri, but I am ignorant of her lineage," continued the duke. "All I know

is that she is looked upon as a relative. Alas ! when first I saw her at church, so modest and so beautiful, I felt as it were enchanted, and thought to find in her an easy conquest. Heaven knows what remorse I feel for having harboured so vile a thought. I did all that is usually done in such cases. Alas, alas ! these foolish acts of mine must have inspired her with an aversion for me ; perhaps she abhors me now ; perhaps" Here his sobs interrupted his utterance for some minutes. On recovering he continued, "Alas, alas ! how hateful my words must have sounded in her chaste ears !"

The Count stared at him in utter astonishment, and muttered to himself, "So curious a specimen of mortality I have never seen in all my life."

"The Falconieri," proceeded the love-sick youth, "requested me to abstain from walking under her windows, as the lady was not noble enough for me as a wife, and far too noble to be my mistress. I made offers of marriage, but when my relations were informed thereof they were furious against me, as though I had committed some heinous sacrilege. They pointed out to me how the nobility of our house would be contaminated. They talked about the possibility of such a misalliance with rage and indignation ; in short, they tormented me almost to distraction, and have nearly driven me out of my senses, as you see. Now I ask you, Count,—

'When Adam delved and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?'"

"Hear, hear!" said Lence, much amused to see the
 youth continue.

"Can they explain to what we differ from the people?
 Are we not the same complaints? Are not the tears of
 the money and the sufferings of our old age the same?
 Can we say to death, as we would say to a creditor, 'Come
 tomorrow.' Do we sleep better in our tombs of marble
 than those who sleep in their wooden coffin? Do the
 worms respect the corpse of an Emperor or a Pope?
 Does not love equalise all classes?"

"Oken isuggungilanza amor h gart.

in something to that purpose was so greatly sung by
 Thessa, I believe, but alas! I remember not. I no longer
 possess either mind, recollection, or anything. For good-
 ness' sake, Count, pour out some remedy for so great an
 ail, for you have wisdom and experience."

"My dear duke, listen to me calmly. You are in the
 right, and your relatives not in the wrong. You are so far
 right, because the smoke of nobility is not worth more than
 the smoke of a pipe. Your relatives are not wrong, because
 they can see, as I see, the artifice of the woman in all this.
 Be not irritated, duke; you came to consult the oracle, and
 the answer must be swallowed, although it may be unpalat-
 able. What appears to you ingenuous modesty on her part
 may only be a studied repulse to add fuel to your flame:
 forbidden fruit is ever the most coveted. The lady foresees
 and runs in the direction of her snares; in short, the

net is cunningly spread, but we must not be conquered by blind impulses. In my younger days we did not stick at trifles. Did a nobleman fancy a plebeian beauty? he obtained her by gold; if refused (a rare occurrence), force was employed. When the girl became troublesome, as would often happen, she was provided with a dowry and a husband."

The duke made a gesture of disgust, but Cenci continued, "Nay, despise not the counsel of the aged, my son; I have more experience than you can have in such matters. Now listen to an excellent proposal. You must first get possession of the girl's person—that is the main point. Should she resist you, marry her and have done with it; but if you can avoid the rock of matrimony do so, because matrimony is, after all, but the tomb of love. Holy water seems fatal to cupid, and matrimony is to love what vinegar is to wine. Besides, you escape the indignation of your relatives and the censure of the world."

"No, Count, no; I had rather plunge a knife into my heart."

"Gently, my romantic young friend; it is never too late for that. Before adopting an evil as a remedy you should consider the matter prudently. You see that my proposition presents two problems and two solutions; they must guide you according to circumstances."

"But if the girl were to take a dislike to me in consequence?"

"Love cures the wounds of love, and beauty always absolves the sins committed at its shrine. Fear not, she

will forgive you. Is not the world as it ever was? Women frequently oppose resistance merely to prove the sincerity of their lovers. At Sparta, when a young man wanted a wife he had to take her by force; nor does history say that the wives were displeased. Did not Herakleia love Romulus? And should we Romans, remembering our Sabine origin, be afraid of violence?"

"But then," observed the duke, meekly, "I am not a man for such things. How am I to act? Where am I to find men who would help me in such an undertaking?"

The Count pretended to reflect, and then exclaimed, as if struck by a sudden thought, "What are friends for in the world? I think I can be useful to you in this matter. Going to the door, he opened it and called out "Olympio!"

The man in the garb of a peasant we described before rose and answered with coarse familiarity, "Oh, you are aware at last that I am still in this world, Eccellenza?"

"Come hither, Olympio."

When that worthy entered the Count's studio he, nevertheless, took his hat off, as the most impudent plebeian will do when he sees the luxurious splendours which surround the great.

"We are still alive, then?" asked Cenci, jocularly.

"Only by the miracle of St. Nicolas," retorted Olympio, "after the last murder I committed for you . . ."

"What are you babbling about, Olympio?" inter-

rupted the Count; "and of what murder are you dreaming?"

"Dreaming, forsooth! Why, you counted down the three hundred ducats in this very room, and no extravagant reward either; but so much the worse for me if I took too little."

Cenci gave him a significant side look, as if to warn him of the presence of the young duke, which caused Olympio to exclaim, "Well, that alters the case altogether. I thought we were all friends here."

"Olympio, to business!" resumed the Count. "We will endeavour to make you draw a cork or two, although we have nothing of importance in hand just now: this is a mere trifle in your profession, just to get your hand in again."

The brigand looked at him with that revolting familiarity which crime is apt to create between accomplices, sitting down, crossing his legs, and leaning his chin on his hand.

The Count explained, "This young nobleman, his Grace the Duke of Altemps, has fallen desperately in love with a certain young lady, supposed to be a maid of honour in the house of Falconieri, a very proud family. My friend the duke . . ."

"Who calls me?" asked Altemps, as if awaking from a dream.

"Poor young man!" remarked Cenci, smiling. "Look, Olympio, how his passion has affected his intellect. I dare say he has not even heard our conversation."

The youth dropped his head and again blushed deeply.

The Count continued, "Olympio, you must carry her off and take her to a place we shall name."

"Any other commands, Eccellenza?"

"Yes; you will introduce yourself into the palace Falconieri at any risk, even by forcing a door or using scaling ladders."

"That'll do, Count; I think I know my business. But let me see, I shall require four companions, also pistols, horses, &c. Now, what will you spend in this enterprise?"

"Will five hundred ducats suffice?"

"No, certainly not," replied the bandit roughly; "after providing materials and paying the comrades nothing will be left for me."

"To conclude at once, you shall get eight hundred, besides all the prospects of future favours."

"I will get the wheels of the carriage greased to carry them home. To the point, Don Francesco, whither am I to take the girl?"

"To his grace's country seat."

"Eccellenza, that is not prudent: as soon as the police get scent of the affair perquisitions will be made at the duke's residences. You must borrow the house of a friend, or, better still, hire one."

While Cenci was occupied in writing Olympio put several direct questions to the duke, who answered them in a desultory manner. The young man recoiled from the fascination of the serpent, and was about to refuse his

consent and to leave the room, when the recollection of his beloved presented itself to his imagination, overcame his virtue, and caused him to succumb in the struggle. His evil genius had conquered, and his good one flew away.

Cenci told Olympio to prepare for to-morrow night, and then addressed the duke: "You will pardon my indiscretion, but I would fain know the name of your *dulcinea*."

"*Lucretia*," sighed forth Altemps.

"*Lucretia*!" exclaimed Cenci; "there certainly is a fatality in that name; it always sets our Roman hearts on fire. However, it will not drive a king from his palace this time. The Popes are more firmly rooted than the Tarquins of old. Italy might as well be without a sun as without its Popes: that benediction—*Urbi et orbi*—fertilises its soil. My friend Olympio, I will detain you no longer. Let nobody see you on leaving my house, for although you are faithful and true to me, still you will easily comprehend that there are many more respectable people in the world than yourself. Marzio will escort you to the garden gate."

When left alone with Cenci, Altemps said, after much stuttering and hesitation, "I am apprehensive, Count, of being ungrateful to you for your kind assistance and wise counsel; still I feel somehow that I cannot thank you."

"Fortune favours you, my dear duke, because fortune is a woman who loves bold young men. Had not Cæsar crossed the Rubicon he would never have become Dictator of Rome."

"True," observed the duke; "but then the *ides* of

March would not have seen him slaughtered under Pompey's statue."

"Forward, young man, forward! We are all under the influence of our stars from the day of our birth. You must succeed. Ancient and modern authors teach you not to hesitate to throw yourself into the arms of fortune. Fortune governs the world. Remember Sylla, who understood better than anybody how to settle all difficulties with the axe."

On leaving his pernicious adviser Altemps felt much distressed at what he had seen and heard. He felt that he had authorised a foul crime to be perpetrated for his gratification, and he apprehended serious consequences; but, being dragged down the declivity of vice, he was too weak to retrace his steps. Passion, that ferocious boa-constrictor of the heart, entwined him more and more, extinguishing the last spark of virtue in a feeble nature.

On being left alone Cenci began to look over what he had written during the dialogue of the duke and Olympio, then read alone in a state of evident exultation,—

"Right reverend and illustrious Monsignor Taverna! an act of infamy is to be perpetrated which will discredit your august and happy administration. The young Duke d'Altemps is on the point of inveigling an innocent maiden from the house of Falconieri by the aid of three or four notorious bandits. The girl's name is Lucretia. A ruffian, named Olympio, guilty of many crimes, and who has hitherto baffled the researches of justice, commands the

enterprise. Be on your guard. They are desperate characters, and the danger will augment their ferocity. This notice is given by an admirer of good order and a zealous son of the holy church.—Rome, August 6th, 1598.”

“Let me see, they cannot recognise the handwriting. *A tout seigneur tout honneur*. He is a duke, and must be served first. As for that precious jewel, Prince Paolo, his turn will come in good time. We must first get rid of Olympio. The net is spread according to the rules of the art.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE AUDIENCE CONTINUED.

AFTER a short delay the married couple were ushered into the studio. The young man walked respectfully towards the Count to kiss his hand, and the woman was about to follow his example, but was suddenly prevented by a loud screaming of the child.

Was it the result of accident, or a presentiment of evil? How little do we know the secret springs of nature!

Cenci looked at the woman and became much irritated. "Who are you, my good people, and in what way can I be of any use to you?"

"Eccellenza," replied the man, "do not you know me again? I am the son of the poor carpenter of the Via Ripetta, who, when ruined four years ago, would have drowned himself but for your timely assistance."

"Yes, yes, I remember you now. You have become a man since that event. How is that good old father of yours?"

"The Lord has called him away, Eccellenza. His last prayer was for you and your family. He was ever praising you, and wishing you all the happiness man can desire."

"Is this your wife, and this your child?"

"Yes, Eccellenza. On this the anniversary of our wedding I thought it but right to present my duties to you, and to offer you our heartfelt thanks, because, after God, we owe our felicity to you."

"Are you happy, then?"

"Very happy, Eccellenza. The recollection of my poor father afflicts me sometimes, although he was old, and died like a child who falls asleep. Poor man! he had no remorse on his conscience."

"And do you also feel happy, my good woman?"

"O yes, Eccellenza, more so than can be expressed by words. Michael loves me, and I love him, and we both love dearly this pretty little angel of ours. Michael earns more than we want; so you see, Eccellenza, if we were not content we should commit a sin against Providence."

"Then you are happy?" asked Cenci for the third time.

"Thanks to you, Eccellenza. Since I came to Michael's house I learnt to venerate your name, and the very first word I mean to teach my pretty darling here shall be a blessing on the name of the charitable Count Cenci."

"You fill my heart with joy," exclaimed Cenci, dissembling his rage. "My good people, the little I did does not deserve so many thanks. Men favoured with riches must assist their fellow Christians who are poor: there is no better way of spending one's wealth than in alleviating misfortunes. Do we not get usurious interests for it in the bank of paradise? There we get back our outlays a

thousandfold. It is I, not you, who must be thankful, because you gave me the opportunity of doing good."

So saying, he offered a handful of ducats to the woman, who refused, with a deep obeisance, but the Count insisted. "Take it, my daughter, take it. You must make amends for not having acquainted me with the birth of this pretty boy. I was entitled to be his godfather. Buy a necklace with the money, and wear it in expiation of this fault. Endeavour to save enough out of it to buy a pretty garment for the child, for, although he is very handsome, you know what the poet says,—

‘Sovente acesce alla beltà,
Un bel manto.’

When people see him they will exclaim, ‘Happy is the woman who gave him birth!’ Your mother’s heart will then leap with joy."

The young mother smiled at first, but when those flattering words fell on her heart she was so moved that her tears gushed forth abundantly, like a spring shower in sunshine.

"Continue to love each other, my children," proceeded the Count, with the solemn accent of a father. "May jealousy never disturb the serenity of your days, and may no house please you so much as your own! In your prayers remember sometimes the poor old man who is not happy himself" (here his countenance became livid); "but if ever you want me rest assured that you will find a father in me."

The young couple were about to kneel down before

him, but he prevented it, and dismissed them most benignantly.

In crossing the ante-room they were heard exclaiming,—
“O the kind man! O the charitable soul!”

Upon hearing which one of the lackeys whispered to the other, “Perhaps the devil has turned saint.”

“Happy! They are happy, then!” Cenci burst out when left alone. “And do they come to inform me of it? They have done it purposely to torment me. I consider this the greatest insult that has been offered to me for a long time. Marzio, hasten to try if you can bring Olympio back before Angelus: if you succeed I’ll give you ten ducats. I will show them whether anybody can come and declare in the face of Count Francesco Cenci that he is happy without shedding tears of blood for it.”

At that inauspicious moment the worthy priest presented himself to the Count. Nero began to growl furiously.

“Silence, Nero! Come in, reverend sir, come in, and do not be alarmed. Speak, I am at your service.”

“Fame, proclaiming your magnanimous deeds all over the world”

“And in Rome?” interrupted the Count.

“That is understood, Eccellenza, because Rome forms part of the world. Fame compares you to Cæsar”

“But which of the two, my reverend friend, Julius or Octavianus?”

“Fame does not explain that,” replied the curate; “but I suppose it must be to the one who, during his life and

after it, bestowed such splendid gifts on the Roman people”

“Now, do you know,” interrupted the Count again, “what enabled him to give so much? I’ll tell you: he robbed the whole world, and contracted those debts that are bequeathed to his descendants, who are obliged to pay them with usurious interests.”

“What, Eccellenza! have you to pay the debts of Julius Cæsar?”

“Before making you comprehend,” replied Cenci, in anger, “explain to me how you presume to compare me to that egregious plunderer of provinces and of kingdoms?”

The poor priest became so confused that he regretted bitterly having made up his mind to recite the above oration, which had cost him so much trouble to prepare. It would have been better after all, he thought, to have spoken extempore.

“Forgive me, Count,” he stuttered out at last; “I did not reflect about that at all. I took my model from the speech of Giovanni della Casa to Charles V.”

“Listen to me,” cried Cenci. “We are both getting old men, and we have little time to spare either of us, therefore speak clearly and be expeditious; whatever is protracted makes me sick, even eternity —”

The poor curate became still more confused, and made the sign of the cross in consequence of the Count’s impiety.

“Eccellenza, I am a curate. My church is like a sieve, the rain drops in from the roof, and the water gets into the

sacred vessels. My rectory is in a dilapidated state likewise : when it rains at night I am obliged to keep my umbrella open to protect my bed from the wet. Often there is no dinner and no supper. I sigh and Marco brays. Marco is my donkey. I have only one tunic ; it is nearly threadbare, but still it would have lasted until December had not your Eccellenza's dog nearly torn it to rags."

The Count asked him sternly, "Do you not make a vow of poverty ?" Why do you complain, then, of a position you have chosen yourself, and one so near to perfection ? Is perfection not agreeable to you ? Would you rather be imperfect with the income of a few thousand scudi than perfect in poverty ? The wealth of priests should not be in this world. Look to the heavens, and choose your field there ; but your heart is hardened. For shame ! for shame ! You are hankering after worldly goods. When the church used wooden chalices her priests were made of gold, so St. Clement tells us ; but now that her chalices are of gold her priests are wooden, and of that sort of wood mentioned in the Bible

'As not fruitful, and to be thrown into the fire.'

The curate listened in utter amazement to all this vituperation, and meekly replied, "St. Clement certainly was a great saint, but I do not see any necessity for him to have kept his umbrella open when in bed to protect himself from the rain."

"Perhaps not," rejoined the Count ; "but if you are in

want of the necessities of life you might appeal to some of our opulent prelates, for they have wealth to spare. Why strive to squeeze the last drop of blood from us laics? Go, knock at the doors of the bishops. Knock, and verily I tell you it shall be opened unto you; ask, and ye shall receive. 'Pulsate et aperietur vobis' was said by Him who never erred."

"I begin to think," replied the priest ingenuously, "that the great dignitaries of the church must be constantly away from home, for I have knocked repeatedly at their doors, but in vain, so that I have ceased at last my useless visits and hammerings."

"You small fry," resumed Cenci, "are the flock of our fat prelates: they milk, they fleece, they roast, and then they devour you. Still you have not the courage to rebel against the iniquitous hierarchy, or let the world know that they monopolise all the benefices, prebends, and abbeys, which enable the dignitaries of the church to revel in dissolute idleness, or grovel in wanton depravity, whilst griping penury renders you, the flock, vile, abject, and bad. Admit, then, that the reformers of the Council of Trent have reformed nothing after all, and that those despicable hypocrites still go on kneading their bread with the meal furnished by Satan."

The priest crossed himself again devoutly, and appeared thunderstruck by this whirlwind of abuse and heresy.

He looked about him bewildered, and said in a whisper, "Be pleased to remember, Count, that here in Rome there

are such things as the Holy Inquisition and the Castle of St. Angelo."

"Oh! you are afraid?" asked Cenci. "Then if you have learnt to tremble you must also learn to suffer. The lamb will lick the hand of the man who is about to cut its throat. There is an example for you! Or, if you are not disposed to accept it, why did you abandon the plough and the shovel of your fathers? Go back and delve. Our common mother earth cares for us all with fostering tenderness; she provides us with food and raiment during life, and a resting-place after death. What more would you require? Oh! you find a breviary less fatiguing than a spade? Away with you! Live as you can, and die as you may; but cease to pester me, for you will not get a single scudo from me. I have no money to supply you with luxuries, and will not incur the responsibility of pandering to your vices.

'Credete voi però, Sardanapali,
Potervi fare hor femine or mariti——''

The curate raised his eyes towards heaven and interposed, "My housekeeper, Verdiana, is old enough to have carried stones for the building of the Coliseum. Do you really suppose, Count, that a man of my age, and, above all, of my sacred calling, could be led astray by such abominations?"

"And why should I not suppose so?" said the Count. "Petrarca said all this, and he was a priest like yourself—an old sinner, who knew more than he chose to reveal."

More and more scandalised, the curate exclaimed, "My God, what horrors am I condemned to hear!"

As if struck by some idea, Cenci suddenly altered his tone and said, "I did not say all this for you, my poor man, but to let you see what we of the laity think of your churchmen. However, a truce to arguments. Tell me, my good curate, how much money will you require to restore your church and rectory?"

"Eccellenza, Verdiana and I have calculated the estimated expense over and over again—she on the cover of the almanac, and I on the margin of my breviary; but we could never agree exactly—her estimate exceeded mine. Still I should think that with something like two hundred ducats everything could be restored. With less it would be hardly possible, although I intend to add forty more of my own savings, which I keep for that purpose in the pew near my bed, and to amass these savings I have read four hundred masses, and have fasted four hundred times."

"Listen to me, reverend sir. I would not presume to rebuild the house of the Lord. He has the means to do that himself. He is arbiter of good and bad weather, so that if He allows the rain to descend into His house it is a clear proof that the rain does not displease Him. I will give you two hundred ducats, but on the express condition that you repair the rectory only."

"Never, Eccellenza, never. I admit that I should be well pleased to repair the dilapidated rectory, and also to purchase a decent frock for myself, and a new dress for poor

Verdiana, who wants one sadly; but the Lord's affairs must take precedence of all our human wants. On this point Verdiana and I are well agreed. We would not have it on our conscience to appropriate to ourselves even a bajocco before we had restored the house of the Lord."

"It were blasphemy, curate, to suppose the Lord to have need of a house to shelter himself from the rain, or from the chill of the night. The universe is the house of the Lord—the stars, the sun, the moon, and all that lives, has being, vegetates, and grows. We should worship the Deity on the magnificent altar of nature, in the offspring of genius, and in the sensibility of mankind."

"Eccellenza," replied the priest, with dignified simplicity, "I am a man of limited intellect. I believe what my forefathers believed, and seek no more. I know that human wisdom aspires, often with culpable temerity, to things beyond its limited comprehension, so that between the doubt which distracts, and the faith which consoles, the wisest plan appears to me to take refuge in faith."

The Count, evidently disconcerted by this plain language, endeavoured to undermine it by a variety of sophistical arguments. "I do not dispute the force of faith," he said, "but your mode of believing. When rain falls in your parish can it be disagreeable to God? He created fire and water. He opens and closes the cataracts of the heavens as easily as I open and close this little box. Come, come, my good friend, admit, at least, that He cares little either for clouds or sunshine. Look at these sparkling

ducats. You shall have them upon the condition that you employ them for your house only. The Lord has means wherewith to pay his own expenses."

It was thus that Satan tempted St. Anthony. A terrible struggle took place in the mind of the minister. The Count insisted strenuously, "Let this argument be conclusive if the others fail. Unless you agree to the condition I will replace the money in the casket."

"Count, let us drop theological polemics. You are not convinced, and I would not exclude you from purgatory; but allow me to point out to you that both the church and the rectory are equally sacred."

"Precisely," said Cenci. "How, then, do you commit so great a sin in beginning with the second instead of the first? Do not be obstinate. Remember that a certain righteous man perished on account of his very righteousness. It will be so much gained towards the fulfilment of your duty."

"Eccellenza, looking upon it in this light, I think . . . it appears to me . . . but still . . ."

"Come, come, my good man, accept my offer, and promise to employ it for your own comforts. God is eternal, as we both believe; therefore it will be of no consequence to Him to wait for four, five, or even six years; I might say centuries. Will you accept them or not?"

"The temptation is very great, Eccellenza; but I fear in so doing I shall commit a grievous sin."

"Will you take them or not?"

"Eccellenza, allow me to reflect; the pangs of remorse are no trifle for a pastor who has the care of souls."

"Place it to my account then, my reverend friend. It is a heavy one, but it will not overload me."

"Well, Count, I consent to accept your offer."

"Here is the money then; but mind you keep your promise. I shall despatch somebody or come myself to see if you have kept your bargain. Should I find it otherwise, beware! My name is Francesco Cenci."

The curate received the gold with satisfaction mingled with remorse, then humbly thanked Cenci and retired.

By this time Marzio had returned in company with Olympio, whom he ushered into the Count's presence, and withdrew again to the ante-room after having received the promised reward.

"Olympio!" exclaimed Cenci, the moment he saw his bravo, "you can earn two hundred and forty ducats more."

"Count, so many good things will give me an indigestion."

"It struck me just now, Olympio, that you were not over-satisfied when you left me, so I had you recalled to offer you another job. You see there is no favour that I am not willing to bestow on you to remove any discontent on your part. What I am going to charge you with is a mere bagatelle. The ducats are yours already—you have only to take them. You saw that crow of a priest just now in my ante-room? Do not look so grim because I talk of priests. I gave him those ducats in trust. He is the

curate of Sta. Sabina. His church and rectory are at a short distance from the village, as you know. There is no one in the house but himself, a donkey, and an old woman. You'll find it an easy job; accomplish it to-night. The money you will find in the pew near the old man's bed."

"But why did you give him the money, Count, if I am to relieve him of it so soon?"

"Listen, Olympio! When I wanted to point out to you what I considered the best way to enter the Falconieri palace you replied that it was not my business to occupy myself with the details of your profession. Do you remember that? Well, then, had not you better use the same discretion towards me?"

"Eccellenza, you are right; say no more. Can I do anything else?"

"Yes, another little service. You know the carpenter who lives in the Via Ripetta?"

"Certainly I know him on account of his house, because, when you had it rebuilt, I went to look at it, and tried to solve the riddle of your generosity."

"Am I not, then, in the habit of doing good? and do not I do you good at this present moment? Olympio, my friend! do not add ingratitude to your other sins, because that vice is most displeasing to the guardian angel."

"There is a difficulty in the matter, Don Francesco. I am engaged to the young Duke d'Altemps for to-morrow night, as you know; and the honour of our profession does not allow us to break our word."

"Leave it to me, Olympio, to obtain the duke's consent to a postponement. You must get into the carpenter's shop to-morrow night somehow. There you will find plenty of wood, under which place these little bundles of combustible matter prepared by me; you will then bar the shop door outside. Serve me faithfully, and I will make you rich. Now leave my palace through the garden again, and mind nobody sees you."

Francesco Cenci walked up and down his studio, rubbing his hands in great satisfaction, exclaiming,—

"This is my holiday! This is what I call enjoying life! This day I have instigated a parricide, concocted an abduction, ordered a conflagration and a burglary. Moreover, I have betrayed the traitors and perverted a saint! While I am in this world Satan may enjoy his siesta."

Opening a volume of Josephus, he cried, "Oh, Titus! thou quack of humanity! thou Jesuit of paganism! Let Judea tell of her fires extinguished with human blood; of her executions, so numerous that there was not space enough in Jerusalem for scaffolds, nor trees enough in Judea to crucify the bodies; eleven thousand prisoners dying of famine; thousands thrown to wild beasts in the amphitheatres! And all those horrors inflicted upon the Hebrew nation because they defended their country with heroism! Thine was an iron nature, O Titus; but thou neither knewest how to love nor how to hate. Thou didst allow a million and a half of human beings to be slaughtered unmoved, but wept when the beautiful Berenice was torn

away from thee. Domitian, thy brother, was made of different stuff. His breast was of steel, his heart of bronze; he was every inch a king. Lightning destroys not such demigods. Julian the Apostate called him a wild beast of an emperor. Had Popes governed as mildly as lambs of God they would have been roasted alive long ago; but the fatherly hearts of their Holinesses took good care that the square of the Vatican should cope with the sanguinary festivities of the one at Valladolid."

Cenci continued to soliloquise: "Had I been at the battle when Satan led the rebel angels against God! God! That word haunts me ever; I cannot drive it away. But who has ever spoken to this God? who has seen Him? For fifty long years have I outraged Him in every way, and still my vineyards thrive. Why did He create me thus? or, if He did not create me, why did He suffer others to cheat Him and spoil His work? *Anima mala?* Are our souls wicked innately? Perhaps so; I certainly have no reasonable motive to dispute it. But had He not the power to make them good or bad? *Pœnituit!* Yes; if He repenteth it is a sure sign that He made a mistake; and if He made a mistake then why do we suffer from the effects of His error? Where is His omniscience? where His omnipotence? where His infinite love? What should we think of the woman who strikes her child because he was born deformed? The book of the world proves at every page that He has erred. Why not cancel the work, then, and recommence anew? The labyrinth of redemption,

which after all has redeemed nothing, only accelerates man's course to perdition. . . . Perdition ! Be it so : it will be my fate, simply because the verdict will be pronounced by a Judge who sits in judgment in His own cause, and from whose decision there is no appeal. All iniquitous judges condemn without appeal.

' Deus autem fecit nos ; non ipsi nos.'

It matters not : if the soul dies with the body I shall be pleased ; if it survives I shall be equally pleased, provided I am not deprived of the power of cursing *per omnia sæcula sæculorum, Amen.*"

CHAPTER V.

ROME.

EVERYTHING in ancient Rome seems supernatural, colossal, and bewilders the imagination.

Who ever surpassed Cæsar in bravery, Cato in integrity, Tiberius in dissimulation, Nero in atrocity, or Claudius in stupidity? Even its women attained the acme of lust or chastity, perfidy or constancy. Lucretia, Cornelia, Portia, Arria, and Eponina were the countrywomen of Livia, Poppia, and Messalina.

The Roman edifices have defied alike the ravages of time, and the still more destructive assaults of barbarians. Europe, Asia, and Africa yet teem with the stupendous relics of that wonderful people.

The Roman eagle spread its wings, and in pluming them scattered its feathers over the universe. In olden time she threw her net over mankind from the Capitol; in our days she still presumes to domineer from the Vatican.

Thus helmeted Rome sent forth its proconsuls as mitred Rome swamps the world with its monks, not that it may mitigate the sufferings of nations, but that it may share in the booty of tyrants.

History shows us that Rome fell like a stricken gladiator, not like a crushed reptile. In both periods she has manifested a marvellous tenacity of existence. In the first she inundated the earth with her blood, battling bravely on till she had shed the last drop; in the second she writhes on like a wounded serpent, the stings of death being powerless before the vitality of her venom.

She who was once mistress of the world now stretches forth her hands for alms. Having abandoned all pretensions to rule by the doubtful right of conquest, she now arrogates to herself universal dominion through the spiritual supremacy of her prelates; but the support of foreign potentates alone has prevented the keys of St. Peter from being exhibited at some modern museum amongst other curious relics of the middle ages.

Sacerdotal Rome must and will perish, but the religion of Christ will survive the wreck.

Her impious Popes, who style themselves the fathers of the faithful, insist on being crowned with jewelled mitres. Our Redeemer told them how to deck their brows—how worthless are all the costliest gems in the universe compared to a single thorn plucked from the crown of our Lord.

Great and stupendous truths were preached to the benighted world in former days by Italian philosophers—truths which shook to its very foundation the power of the priesthood—truths which were rejected with horror by the wilfully blind.

Judges and prelates alike condemned and denounced

them as errors, ruthlessly inflicting torture, imprisonment, and the stake, to prevent them from going forth to enlighten the world. Arnolfo di Brescia and Savonarola may serve as examples of such martyrdoms. The moral, "Love justice, ye who are appointed to judge on earth," found no echo in the hearts of Popes. They have ever shown themselves as true to the cause of tyranny as the needle to the pole. The day will come when they themselves must descend from the judgment-seat, and stand forth to be judged; and then assuredly will there be many who will be tried in the balance and found wanting.

Francesco Cenci was but a modern representative of the old Roman corruption. His indomitable temper and his implacable disposition contributed to render him a moral monster. Had he lived in the days of Junius Brutus he would not only have condemned his sons, but would have beheaded them with his own hands. He was endowed with profound wisdom, which, however, he despised. His princely fortune he scattered about, but the immensity of his revenues was proof against his profusion.

He saw the two roads of good and evil traced out before him. His power of judgment and keen perception pointed out to him the goal towards which each would lead him; but his conception of good was confined to the power of building a church or a monastery, or of relieving poverty by alms, which only serves to perpetuate the evil. Like Milton's Satan, he made his choice: "Evil! be thou my good."

The Titans, who raised a rebellious hand against heaven, were his models; and the idea of surpassing all former iniquities appeared to him like transplanting the columns of Hercules or discovering new worlds. He entered into family ties only to tear them asunder, and pretended to entertain affections only to outrage them by cruel mockery. He believed not in God; but the iron entered his soul at the bare idea of the Deity. He blasphemed like the bear who bites the lance that has transfixed him, in the belief that by so doing he revenges himself on his enemy. Altogether he was a strange but homogeneous compound of an Ajax, a hero, a bandit, and a Don Juan. His life was a curse to himself and to all around him. He hated and was hated; he nourished himself from his youth on evil, and died at last from the effects of his first nourishment. He died, however, as he had often expressed a desire to die. When he found his constitution impaired by age and disease, and having less energy left to injure others, his ferocious nature exulted in the reflection of the carnage which might plunge his whole family into a blood-stained sepulchre.

CHAPTER VI.

NERO.

" Fanciulla del dolore, o tu che sai
 Piacer anco sepolta, e ricoperta
 Dal silenzio di tre cento anni, bella
 Sai tornare all'idea come nel giorno
 Che te lo amor rapiva, o tu delizia
 Dei racconti di queste itale care
 Fanciulle, che spirar sai delle stesse
 Dipinte tele, onde l'occhio fatale
 Dal tuo sguardo, in Imago ancor ti cerca
 Radiviva per Roma, abbi il mio pianto."

ANFOSSI, *Beatrice Cenci*.

By some inscrutable dispensation of Providence the monster whom we have attempted to describe was blessed, or rather cursed, with a daughter who was beautiful as the conception of the Creator when He sent forth into Paradise the graceful consort to gladden the solitude of the first man.

She diffused around her an atmosphere of life and beauty, which clings like a halo even to her memory.

The rosy-handed cupid had moulded the delicate arches of her sweet face, and impressing his forefinger on her chin, as if enamoured, like Pygmalion, by the contemplation of his masterpiece, he left a dimple there. Her mouth resembled

a fragrant flower just plucked from Paradise, and the graceful symmetry of her form recalled to the memory those celestial beings who occasionally appear before us in the dreams of our childhood. She would often turn her soft and beautiful eyes towards heaven, either to contemplate the regions from which she had descended for a brief sojourn here upon earth, or to ponder "in maiden meditation, fancy free," on certain mysteries that seemed to be revealed to her only. Those on whom she gazed here below felt as though suffused with a poetical expansion of the soul. The very air that surrounded her, and the very heavens that canopied her, appeared more fragrant and beautiful. When at a ball or festivity the lights seemed more brilliant and the music more entrancing by her presence, while her absence was the precursor of a general gloom. Alas ! sorrow had already gnawed her innocent heart, but had as yet failed to leave any mark on her angelic brow.

The prayer of mortals might have lighted for a moment on that face, and then proceeded more purified to the throne of the Eternal.

In the gladsome days of her youth—alas ! how short and fleeting !—she would, at times, in childish gaiety unloose the rich volume of her auburn tresses, as if to challenge comparison with the rays of the setting sun, which blazed on them amorously with such splendour, that they who witnessed the exuberant spectacle were lost in ecstasy, and looked upon her as an angel of light. Beauty ! Love ! twin spirits that were by the side of the

Almighty on the day of the creation, He sent ye as His first pioneering ministers upon earth. Deformity and hatred were of later birth, and were sparks glancing from the first thunderbolt. The veneration for beauty and love leads us back to their heavenly origin.

Beatrice sat on a balcony of the Cenci palace overlooking a garden. In her lap there lay a child, who, from a general resemblance of features, might have been recognised as her brother.

Ever and anon she tenderly caressed him. The boy rested his head on her bosom, and gazed intently on her; but his glassy eyes were lustreless, like those of a person abstracted by something not of this world.

Disease had withered the bloom of his youth. His skin was feverish, and of so delicate a white as to be almost transparent. At times he sighed convulsively. Presently Beatrice asked him,—

“Of what are you thinking, my dear Virgilio?”

“I am thinking that it would have been a mercy if we had never been born.”

“Ah, Virgilio!”

“But, as there is no remedy for that, it were better that we should depart as soon as possible.”

“Depart! And why?”

“And why remain here? My heart has long been dead, and when the heart is dead it is hard for the body to survive.”

“My dearest brother, you are but just ripening into

existence, and you already pronounce words of despair. That is not right. Live and be joyful, darling. You little know what roses fortune may have in store for you."

"Roses! fortune! Look, sister: if fortune have any roses in store for me she preserves them to deck my coffin. Fortune has abandoned us on the day that we lost our mother."

"But, dear Virgilio, we cannot call ourselves orphans altogether; Donna Lucretia has the feelings of a mother for us."

"That may be, Beatrice; but still she is not our mother."

"And do you count me, your sister, for nothing?"

"O yes, kind sister!" replied the boy, throwing his arms round her neck and weeping bitterly; "but, for all that, you are not my mother."

"Besides, have you no brothers? have you not a father?"

"A father?"

Beatrice, terrified by the child's convulsive start, was silent for a time, and then faltered on, "Is not Francesco Cenci our father?"

The boy bowed down his head, closed his eyes, crossed his arms on his chest, and replied with a low voice, "Sister, look at my forehead—at the scar under my hair. Look at this wound. Do you see it? and do you know whose hand inflicted it? I never told you before; but now that I feel my death approaching you shall know all. I had often reflected on the hatred with which I had inspired my father,

and feeling how little I deserved his loathing, I one day took courage and threw myself at his feet, trying to seize and kiss his hand ; but he spurned me from him, exclaiming, ' Out of my sight, bastard ! ' and then he gave me so violent a blow that I fell against the corner of the chest in his studio. He looked at me contemptuously as I lay bleeding before him, but did not assist me. Here, under my hair, you may trace the wound which he then inflicted, and this is the disease that hurries me to an early grave."

Beatrice shuddered. The child, laying bare his shoulder-arm, continued with increasing vehemence, " Look at the mark of this bite on my arm. Do you know who inflicted it ? Nero. I will tell you when and how. One day I gathered a beautiful peach in the garden, and said to myself, ' I will go and offer it to my father ; perhaps it will please him ; ' so I hastened to his studio, opened the door, and found him reading. Fearing to disturb him, I advanced gently, when on a sudden Nero flew at me, and bit me in the arm. I shrieked with pain, but my father laughed at me. Had it not been for Marzio he would have allowed the dog to tear me to pieces."

The bosom of Beatrice heaved convulsively.

" Look, sister ! " and the child pushed aside his hair. " Do you see a little bare spot here ? A lock of hair is torn out, is there not ? Do you know who tore it out ? It was my father. Some time after I had been crushed within myself by these cruel humiliations, and whilst my head was still bandaged, I felt so mortified and hurt that I

resolved to present myself boldly before my father, and said, 'Father, how have I offended you, and why do you hate me? Bless your child, father, for he loves you.' Whereupon he put his hand in my locks, twisted one of them playfully round his finger, and then pronounced the following dreadful words:—'If you were made of sulphur, and my words were fire, I should then bless you that my blessing might consume you. Hence, viper! Since I hate you, you must hate me also.' He then dragged me about so violently that I suffered excruciating pain, feeling as if the whole skin of my head would be torn away; but luckily the lock of my hair only was left in his grasp, when he pushed me away, exclaiming, 'I curse you and your children if you ever procreate any. May you all live in misery, be nurtured in crime, and die on the scaffold!' Now, Beatrice, tell me, can I desire to live? My mother has left me, and my father has cursed me! Is it not better for me to die?" and he wept bitterly.

Beatrice was at a loss to find words to soothe such profound affliction. Her tears gushed forth from her eyes, and prevented her for some time from speaking. At length she made a violent effort, kissed her brother, and said in a mild tone,—

"Calm yourself, my own Virgilio; perhaps you had not chosen your time well."

"No, Beatrice, he was tranquil."

"Understand me, dearest brother; he might have been

out of temper at that moment through some care or annoyance."

"No, Beatrice, he was gay. He played with the dog who nearly tore his child to pieces. I cannot love him any more. Whenever I see him a shudder seizes me, and his very voice makes my head throb. Often, when my fever leaves me for awhile, I fancy that I see a dark place afar off, and hear horrible oaths and blasphemies, and then a tremulous voice seems to whisper, 'This is the road to hatred; you must follow it, Virgilio.' But I will not go there; I will not hate anybody, still less my own father: I had rather die."

Beatrice had often changed colour during the boy's piteous tale. She now felt faint from very sickness; but recovering, she lifted her eyes towards heaven, endeavoured to speak, but failed. At last she uttered a deep sigh, and said, "Virgilio, we must not despair; we must pray to God to inspire our father with kinder feelings towards us."

"And do you think that I have not prayed, Beatrice? I have prayed a great many times. The night before his last act of cruelty I rose from my bed, and went down to the chapel. There I knelt down, and prayed with all the fervour of my soul that our father's heart might be softened, and inspired with better feelings towards me; but, alas! my prayers were unheeded; so I went again and again to prostrate myself before God, earnestly beseeching Him thus: 'Have mercy on me, O Divine Redeemer! Grant me

a father's love, or take me to Thyself !' I fancied the image of the crucifix moved its head and said, 'Thy prayer shall be granted.' So now I know and feel that the latter part of my prayer was vouchsafed, but not the first. When I returned to bed I heard a voice distinctly calling out to me, 'Virgilio, Virgilio !' I started up and threw open the door, but seeing nobody returned to rest again. Presently I heard the voice calling out to me a second time, upon which I exclaimed, 'Who calls me ?' 'A voice from paradise,' was the reply. I am ready, good Lord, and cheerfully await your summons. . . . "

"My beloved brother, these are but the effects of fever ; you must not allow yourself to be so deceived. Forget all this, and strive to be of good cheer."

"But why do you call it deception, Beatrice ? Do we not read in Scripture that the Lord spoke to Samuel ? Listen to me. Last night I could not sleep, and my eyes were open, when suddenly the room was illuminated, and I beheld a beautiful lady in a sky-blue dress sparkling with diamonds. She glided to my bedside, placed her pale face close to mine, kissed me, and then disappeared. Now, shall I tell you, Beatrice, who that lady was like ? She exactly resembled our mother as she is represented in that fine portrait in our large saloon."

Beatrice arose and placed the boy on the parapet of the balcony, supporting him with her arm, and pointing with her finger, resumed, "Look ! behind yonder mountains is a fertile valley, which was our mother's

dowry. There, in a beautiful church dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, lie the bones of our blessed parent under a marble monument."

Whilst thus lifting her arm a portrait and a letter dropped from her bosom into the garden. She was much chagrined, and, blushing deeply, exclaimed, "Gracious powers, my secret!"

Francesco Cenci happened to be walking in the garden, and, seeing something fall, hurried to the spot to seize it; but Virgilio, observing his sister's alarm, made a desperate and successful effort to scramble down from the balcony, and quickly possessed himself of the lost treasure.

"Come hither," cried his father, who could not move fast by reason of his lameness; "come hither, sir! Bring me those things directly."

Virgilio pretended not to hear him, and hurried on without turning his head.

Don Francesco, not being able to overtake the boy, called Nero, and hallooed him on; but Virgilio had fortunately cleared the steps, and had reached his sister's side panting and exhausted. Beatrice had just time to seize an antique javelin that happened to stand near her, when the dog rushed in furiously to attack her brother. By the brute's own impulse the weapon entered his chest, and was buried in his heart. Weltering in his blood, he uttered a savage yell and expired.

Francesco Cenci next appeared. He brandished his sword in his hand, and cried out, "Where is the infamous

viper? Ha! who has killed Nero? Where is the assassin? He shall die the death”

Beatrice lifted the blood-stained javelin with one hand, while with the other she protected her little brother, and then exclaimed, with a vehemence impossible to describe, “Father, approach us not!” and, when Cenci still attempted to advance, Beatrice repeated the same warning with terrible energy.

There was something awful in the sound of her voice, the solemnity of her entreaty, and the calmness of her threat. Even Cenci stood appalled at the change in her appearance; her eyes flashed fire, her nostrils were dilated, her lips were compressed, and her bosom heaved convulsively. She might have been compared to the cherub brandishing his sword at the gates of Eden after the sin of our first parents.

Francesco Cenci stood awhile as if bewildered, then dropped his sword and offered to embrace her.

Beatrice flung her weapon away, when the old man exclaimed, “Child, you are beautiful! Why do you not love me?”

“Father, I will love you;” and she threw herself into his arms in a transport of filial affection. For a moment nature forced her way through the icy barriers of Cenci’s heart, but flew back affrighted with the rapidity of the lightning’s flash.

The pure embrace of his child engendered a paroxysm of crime. His eye became inflamed, assuming a sinister expression. He kissed her repeatedly, and whispered some-

thing in her ear. Beatrice's face suddenly became deadly pale. Tearing herself from his embrace, she lifted her prostrate brother and withdrew, darting a look of such intense horror and disgust at her father, that it seemed to petrify all the blood in the veins even of Francesco Cenci, a being who feared neither God nor man.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHURCH OF ST. TOMASO DEI CENCI.

"He hated his children so much that he had a church constructed in the court of his palace, called St. Tomaso, with the sole intention of burying them all there."

NOVÆ's *History*.

THE church of St. Tomaso dei Cenci, although it has undergone many changes, may still be seen. Tradition relates that Cencio, Bishop of Sabina, consecrated its altar in the year 1113. Pope Julius III. bestowed it upon Rocco Cenci in 1554, on condition of his restoring it, but this was prevented by his death. Pius IV. subsequently bestowed it upon Francesco Cenci, son of Christopher, in 1565, imposing the same conditions, which he fulfilled, as is proved by the following inscription still over the door:—

"Franciscus Cincius, Christophori filius
Et ecclesiæ patronus, templum hoc
Rebus ab divinum cultum et ornatum
Necessariis ad perpetuam
Rei memoriam exonorari ac perfici
Curavit, anno jubilei, 1575."

An inscription which posterity has accepted as proof of the piety of Francesco Cenci, with that discriminating

sense of justice with which it has accepted many epitaphs, inscriptions, funeral orations, and official announcements. . . .

The church was of a quadrangular form, of a mixed Doric order, but of that description known as *Barocco* on the decline of art. It contained five chapels. The roof was in the form of a cross, where the arms of the house of Cenci may be discovered to this day.

Over the principal altar there hung an oil picture painted in the manner of the sixth century, representing St. Thomas touching the wound of our Saviour ; and on the left of the same altar was the painted crucifix which had so supernaturally affected poor Virgilio's feverish imagination. The crucifix was a work of the twelfth century, and was much venerated in the neighbourhood.

Wondrous tales had been told about it. An ancient manuscript preserved in the Capitol, and signed by Jacopo Cenci, declares that the padre guardiano of the church of Ara Cæli had given the above relic to the said Jacopo ; and it is therein affirmed on oath that St. Gregorio addressed his prayers to that very crucifix, which had operated several miracles in consequence of that saint's intercession. We have not been able to ascertain, in spite of all our researches, whether its virtue has lasted to our days, or been transferred to our lady of Rimini, who has attained such celebrity in our own time by the startling feat of winking her eyes. This much is certain, that during the lifetime of

the said Jacopo Cenci the crucifix 'ceased to perform miracles, upon which Master Jacopo became irritated about his bad bargain, and addressed himself to the padre guardiano, of whom he had bought it for a considerable sum, complaining of its loss of power, or rather expressing his profane doubt of its ever having performed any miracles at all, whereon the holy friar turned on his heel and replied somewhat rudely, "I am sorry to tell you, most noble sir, that this is only a proof that neither you nor any of your family are worthy of such favours."

The church of the house of Cenci stands upon the ruins of the ancient Teatro Balbo, a church upon a theatre ! Centuries pass away like figures on the painted slides of a magic lantern. The world represents the wall on which the figures are reflected, and in the ever-changing variations what strange vicissitudes are seen ! We build upon the tomb of our forefathers, and succeeding generations will build upon ours. Ashes upon ashes ! Thus the world grows, constantly adding to the everlasting alluvia of death. The present generation hallows with its prayers and offerings the ground whereon wild revellers were wont to assemble for their midnight orgies. To-morrow the scaffold may raise its grim front thereon ; the next day may see a dancing-booth in its place.

On the 10th of August the chapel of St. Tomaso di Cenci was hung with black cloth, interwoven with garlands of flowers and branches of cypress.

Seven tenantless coffins stood in a row, as if waiting for

their inmates. They all bore the same inscription in the corrupt Latin of the time :—

“ Si caritem, carita temque quæris
Hinc intus jacent
Non ingratus hærus
Neroni cani bene meritisso
Francescus de Cenciis hoc titulum
Ponere curavit.”

In the centre stood a coffin covered with velvet embroidered with gold. Around it were burning six wax candles in silver candelabra of the most exquisite workmanship.

Groups of priests, attired in full canonicals, were chanting a funeral dirge whilst waiting for the body. Presently the pattering of steps was heard, the drapery before the doors was thrown open, and a litter, borne by four persons, was seen approaching. The bearers were Giacomo and Bernardino Cenci in front, and Lucretia and Beatrice in the rear. The corpse was that of poor Virgilio. It had pleased God to vouchsafe the latter part of the boy's prayer: he slept in peace!

The bier was followed by numerous servants carrying lighted torches, and dressed in new black liveries, which contrasted painfully with the shabby apparel of Giacomo and Bernardino. Giacomo wept bitterly, partly from grief, and partly from constrained rage. Bernardino wept also, not from spontaneous impulse, but rather out of sympathy: his mind was stultified and his sensations deadened through dread of his father.

Though Donna Lucretia was only a stepmother, she could not control her grief; but, bigoted rather than devout, she was more easily resigned. Meek under misfortunes, she attributed everything to the holy will of heaven.

Francesco Cenci had married her because she was reported to have said, in a conversation respecting Count Cenci's impiety, "I would rather marry the foul fiend himself than that man." From the moment this speech was repeated to him he resolved to possess the woman who uttered it at any cost. He commenced by feigning exemplary habits, frequenting the churches, and giving large sums to the priests, those worthy sacristans of paradise; so that Donna Lucretia began to believe that he had been calumniated, or at least that he had reformed and changed, and that he would be sure to go on in the right path if he were properly guided. She thought, also, that it would be a noble mission for a devout woman to save a soul from the fangs of Satan. She was, moreover, influenced by the arguments of her interested relations, and by the great wealth and lofty lineage of Cenci.

Thus this devout but weak woman yielded by degrees, and at last consented to espouse him.

Scarcely had he led her to the bridal chamber ere he told her in bitter irony, "You said that you would rather marry Satan than myself, so I have married you to prove that you were right." He kept his word. Frequently when she was kneeling at prayers he would kneel by her side, and whisper gross ribaldry into her ear. He next

tried, by the most abominable means, to undermine her ideas of religion and morality, to fill her soul with doubts and fears; but his fiendish language was beyond Donna Lucretia's comprehension; indeed, she invariably refused to listen to him, betaking herself again to her prayers. Cenci was much embarrassed by his failure, and finding at last that he could not move or alter her, he changed his tactics by compelling her to listen to accounts of his own adulteries and murders; but when even that failed to irritate her he filled his house with abandoned women. Against this fresh outrage she gently remonstrated by exclaiming, "May the Lord mend and forgive you as I forgive you!"

Don Francesco could not hit on any method of moving that cold, unexcitable woman. Often, when blinded by rage, he humiliated her in the presence of the servants, and even struck and otherwise ill-treated her, compelling her to go about coarsely clad, whilst her food was as coarse and scant as her raiment. Her face often exhibited proofs of his ruffianly violence; but even this was in vain. She endured all with resignation, and looked upon it as an atonement of her sins.

Cenci gave up persecuting her in despair. Strange to say, her patience wore him out; in fact, he looked upon her at last as a being devoid of all sensibility, not worthy the trouble of being tormented or caressed.

Beatrice had followed the steps of the other pall-bearers mechanically until they all reached the mausoleum. When there she arranged the body of the boy with her own

hands, adjusting his hair, and laying a crucifix and a bouquet of violets on his breast. Then placing her elbow on the coffin, and her head on the palm of her hand, she kept her mournful eyes fixed on the features of the deceased.

Besides those whom we have enumerated three more children had been born to Francesco Cenci, viz., Cristoforo and Felice, who were studying at Salamanca in Spain, and a girl of the name of Olympia, who, not having been able to submit any longer to her father's persecution, had written a spirited memorial to the Pope, praying to be placed in a convent until she could be otherwise provided for. The prudent memorialist had revealed only the most credible of her father's iniquities. Of his greater crimes she had said nothing, for fear of not being believed, and destroying thereby the effect of the others. The Pope had given orders for her immediate removal from the paternal roof, to be placed in a convent; and after a lapse of time she was married to Count Gabriel Gabrielli, to whom Cenci was compelled to disburse a dowry consistent with his wealth.

We find in the records of the time that Cenci was so furious at her success, that he offered ten thousand scudi to any one who should bring him back his hated daughter dead or alive.

The Pope, however, protected her from his machinations, and Cenci made his rage and fury recoil on the heads of his other children.

The priests left the chapel after having mumbled over the service for the dead, which they performed with about

as much enthusiasm as soldiers when they go through the drill. The crowd of domestics, and the good people who had come from the neighbourhood, had all followed the priests.

The members of the Cenci family only were left kneeling and praying. Beatrice was overwhelmed with grief; but at last she rose up, and thus addressed her relatives: "Do you know who it is that has killed this brother of ours? Do you know it? Yes; but you tremble to think even of his name. That which you dare not think of in secret I will reveal to you openly. His father, our father, Francesco Cenci was his murderer!"

They all wept more bitterly. "Rise," she continued; "I command you, rise! We must provide for our own safety, and quickly too, or we shall share his fate."

"Peace, my daughter, peace," said Lucretia; "it is a sin to allow anger to overcome us. Come, dear Beatrice, kneel down with us, and submit to His holy will."

"Mother, you talk of obeying God, and you blaspheme! Do you, then, think that the Almighty has created the waters only to drown us, and fire to burn us? Where did you learn that the duty of a father consists in torturing and murdering his children? and that children must submit thus to be tortured? Think you not there is a limit at which resistance becomes legitimate, and rebellion justifiable? Has nature stamped on the brow of mankind, 'Suffer and be silent?' Will the blood of Abel find no avenger? Are we to groan without a murmur, and be

crushed unresisting like worms? Giacomo! you are a man. Feel you not something here?" and the intrepid girl laid her hand on his heart.

"Oh, Beatrice!" he replied, "I no longer am what I was; my best energies are gone; I am but a shadow of my former self. What can I do against fate? I have had a hard struggle; but sudden misfortunes, like sudden diseases, are beyond the power of medicine. Look, dear sister, how deeply my misfortunes have humiliated me. I have no decent or cleanly raiment to cover me; my children are often without a morsel of bread; I have a desolate wife whom I love dearly, but I fly from my home to avoid hearing their lamentations; despair follows me; a thousand scorpions are gnawing at my heart. I can hardly obtain a fraction of the two thousand scudi that my father was adjudged to pay me; he withholds from me even the interest of my wife's dowry. I have appealed again and again to the holy father, and, following our sister Olympia's example, I threw myself at his feet, and prayed for my children and for you; but the harsh old man was unmoved by my tears, and turned a deaf ear to my entreaties. He fixed his cold grey eyes upon me, and then pronounced the following cruel words: 'Woe to the sons who lay bare the shame of their fathers! For that crime was Ham cursed, whilst Shem and Japheth, who had shown respect for their parent, were exalted, and their offspring dwelt in the tabernacles of Canaan. Did you ever read that Isaac murmured against his father? Did the daughter of Jephtha retire to the mountains to

utter imprecations? A father is the representative of God in this world. Had you turned aside your face you would not have seen the guilt of your parent, and would not then have accused him. Depart from me in peace.' Thus you see that Olympia found favour where I met with disdain and indignation. Fate will have it so, and how can man struggle against fate?"

"He can die," said Beatrice.

"True, my sister; but I have children—I have a wife who loves me. Were it not for them my corpse would probably long ere this have been carried away by the waters of the Tiber. But, alas! I now see that death alone can relieve my sorrows, since even my own sister urges me to the dread resource of despair."

Beatrice changed colour, and, stretching out her hand to her brother, calmly observed, "Wickedness and impiety inundate the whole earth. Forgive me, dear brother, and forget my rash words. Be a man, Giacomo! In the depth of my grief I despaired of the mercy of God, but He has forgiven me."

"Who conspires here between the altar and the grave?" shouted a voice of thunder. It was that of Francesco Cenci.

Startled like doves at the sight of a hawk, none dared to lift their eyes. Beatrice alone remained unmoved and resolute before him, looking him full in the face, when he continued, "Let the saints bear witness that I have such excellent children that they conspire to compass the death of their father. What impedes your machinations? What

resistance can an unarmed old man offer to his rebellious offspring? The place is well adapted for sacrifice; the Lord is present, and the altar is ready before you. Where is your knife? Oh, ye coward crew! You dare not attack me! Shall I instruct you how to carry out your design with perfect safety? On some quiet night when I am asleep, so that my eyes cannot frighten you, you must plunge a dagger here, under my left breast: you will see how easily it will penetrate. Even the wretched little spider that lies there" (he pointed to the coffin) "could have done it."

They all hid their faces with horror, but Cenci proceeded in the same tone of revolting irony,—

"Listen to me. We are here amongst ourselves; nobody sees and nobody hears us. What if you were to give me some poison that would lull me into a long and lasting sleep? For you see I care for the honour of my name, and would not for the world have my scutcheon sullied by a public execution. Permit me, then, to recommend some subtle poison, or perhaps you will allow me to call your attention to the still safer and equally efficacious mode adopted by Manfred. You must know, my dears, that he was tired of waiting for the crown of Sicily, and that the Emperor Frederick, his father, on the contrary, was in no particular hurry to leave his own kingdom for that of heaven. Now listen: Manfred was reading at his father's bedside, when presently the old man became drowsy, and fell asleep so soundly, that only a slight breathing revealed the presence of life—a breath that would not suffice to

tarnish a crystal or to ruffle a feather. It was as the last streak of a rivulet disappearing in the sands. Manfred took a pillow from under his father's head, and placed it on it instead—a thing, you see, of little moment, my dears. He then jumped on the bed, and pressed the pillow against the old man's mouth and nostrils until he had lost a father for whom he cared but little, and gained a crown for which he cared very much."

"Horrible, horrible!" cried Beatrice. "Horrible!" repeated all the others.

"What are you horrified about, my dears? Are you afraid to burn your fingers when swimming in a sea of fire? You should play in it and laugh amongst tortures, otherwise you are not demons, but reptiles. The stern works of Satan you must leave to me, for they are my province and perquisite. Look at those seven coffins! I had them made for my seven beloved children. Mine is not there, because I hope to have the honour of assisting at all their funerals in person. But let us pray. God of Moses, to me unknown, powerful and jealous persecutor to the fourth and fifth generation of all those who hate Thee, vouchsafe that I may witness the last agonies of all my children; that I may close their eyes, and deposit them quietly within these coffins, and then I will swear to Thee to make a bonfire of my palace and all my treasures. But shouldst Thou not have the power or the will to concede this, I will consent to die before them on condition that I may be enabled to stretch forth my hand from out of my grave to drag them

after me into a blood-stained sepulchre. However, if Thou heedest not my request I shall look to it myself in good time. Meanwhile, depart all of you, and deliver me from your hateful presence."

As they were about to retire Cenci followed Giacomo, seized him by the arm so as to compel him to remain, and thus addressed him: "You complained of being poor, did you? But tell me of what besides did you complain, you slothful dog?"

"Unhand me, Count!" screamed Giacomo, trembling with indignation, and struggling with his utmost efforts to liberate his arm from the old man's powerful grasp.

"No, sir, I shall not release you until I have taught you how to provide food and raiment for your children. You can take them my malediction; I make them an irrevocable gift of it *inter vivos*. From the devil they came, and to the devil they must go!"

Giacomo, half frantic, made another desperate effort to free himself from the gripe of his unnatural parent, and then rushed away, lest his long pent-up indignation and accumulated wrongs should have driven him to smite the monster where he stood.

Lucretia and Bernardino, frightened and horrified, followed Giacomo; Beatrice remained standing motionless at the head of the coffin.

"And do not you also tremble?" he asked.

Beatrice answered not, but lifted her hands in prayer: "Most Holy Father Almighty, be merciful to his poor soul!"

"You silly child! there is no"

"Silence, old man! Reflect that you may have to appear before His tribunal at a moment's notice, and that He alone can forgive and save you."

Cenci, with fiendish glee, as if inspired by a demon, laughed aloud and said, "Come hither, child, and I will prove to you the truth of my theory." He ascended the altar, struck it with his fist, and howled forth blasphemies and abominations which will not bear repetition, and then, returning to the coffin, laid his hand on the lid, under which his dead son Virgilio reposed, and said, "This body is not dead. Our forms are changed, but never destroyed. Matter existed before the creation, and will exist after the dissolution of the world. This little body will produce a thousand lives, and when they die others revive in perpetual succession of life and death—that is all. True philosophy, O daughter of my heart, true knowledge consists in reaping the greatest possible pleasure from the form nature actually has awarded to us. Beatrice, you are the only one I love; you are the happiness of my life."

Then, advancing towards her, he attempted to embrace her; but Beatrice uttered a shriek, retreated to the other side of the coffin, and exclaimed, "Be this murdered innocent an eternal barrier between us." She then fled horrified from the church, rushed to her stepmother's, and fell at her feet in a state of convulsive hysterics, without being able to utter a word.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SIROCCO.

A DAMP southerly wind was blowing from the sea towards Rome, driving cloud after cloud before it like the horses of the Apocalypse, heavy and impregnated with malaria, sowing the seeds of death, disease, and destruction upon the face of the earth. An accursed wind is that same sirocco, reaching both mind and body; its unseen presence, heralded by clouds of dust, drives the wayfarer to his home, where heat and fever await his arrival.

Towards the evening of such a day a married pair were seated in a humble apartment. A tallow candle was burning on a small wooden table. The husband sat with his head buried in his hands, as if overwhelmed with intense sorrow. The wife seemed struck down with suffering and despair, addressing him with the feverish bitterness engendered by poverty and discontent. "No," said she, "you will never make me believe in such wickedness; it would be enough to make the sun hide his brow from very shame."

The man was Giacomo Cenci, the woman Luisa Vellia, his wife. He was twenty-five years of age, thick-set and short, and with an emaciated countenance, expressive of

deep sorrow. His education had been much neglected, but a passionate attachment for Luisa had done much to soften his character. She was a strong-minded woman, belonging to a poor but ancient family, and had returned his affection, not because he was a member of a noble and wealthy race, but because she knew him to be deeply miserable.

Man must admit that woman is more capable of sacrifices than himself. Women are susceptible of every generous impulse. They console us in affliction, and tend our sick beds. When the physician and the priest abandon the dying, who remains? That ministering angel, woman! I am strongly inclined to quarrel with the painter who first represented angels as youths. All who remember a mother's devoted affection, the loving caresses of a sister, the sighs of the girl we have loved, and the tender consolation of a wife, will readily agree with me that angels should appear in the form of the softer sex; not, however, with that Cyprian expression, lascivious smile, and glaring eye of Mahomet's houris, nor with any terrestrial passions, but gentle and modest, as the divine Raphael knew how to paint them, ready to minister wherever a soul is issuing forth from its mortal prison, and guide it towards heaven.

Luisa had borne four sons to Giacomo. At one time the family lived in comfort in the Via St. Lorenzo; but the moment old Cenci thought himself safe by the death of Clement VII. he commenced withholding first a portion, and then the whole of their allowance. The consequence was that in the course of a short time the

family found themselves deprived of the common necessities of life.

Luisa struggled on as well as she could, and strove to conceal her troubles, which had lately become augmented by doubts of her husband's fidelity. Reproaches would break forth at times in spite of her efforts to suppress them. On that dismal evening something even more bitter than her poverty took possession of her mind.

"My dear Luisa," said Giacomo, "come near to me, out of hearing of the children, and I will relate to you all about our poor dear Virgilio; but first I must tell you how my blessed mother died."

Luisa shook her head. Giacomo continued: "Lady Virginia, my mother, was a prey to deep melancholy, and seldom left her apartments. On a certain day at dinner, while she turned her head to call a servant, Don Francesco, as quick as a serpent's tongue, threw a little white powder into her glass. On drinking my mother complained of a bitter taste, and reproached the butler; but the Count took the glass, tasted the beverage, and assured her that it was very old Alicante. I was about to say something about the powder, when my father gave me such a look that I dared not speak. 'Lady Virginia,' he said to her, 'when we are a little unwell everything tastes bad: we must pay no attention to it.' Three days after this she died, and he would not permit the doctors to examine the body."

"I am well aware," said Luisa, impatiently, "that Count

Francesco, your father, is no saint ; but your ceaseless vituperation of him only recoils on yourself. His Holiness looks upon you as a heartless son, and refuses us justice in consequence of your having revealed those horrors to him. For shame, Giacomo ! Remember that you are traducing your own father, and that in your turn your children may hate you."

"My children hate me, Luisa ? Are you bereft of your senses this evening ?" asked Giacomo, in utter astonishment.

Luisa's passion had unfortunately been kindled by some recent information, so she proceeded in the same tone, "Here are your children half naked, hungry, and you provide not for them. Your home, once so dear to you, pleases you no longer. You are constantly absent, and when at home you are silent."

"Luisa, my dear wife, the sight of so much misery overwhelms me, and drives me from my home. How can you ascribe my absence to any other motive ?"

"But tell me, Giacomo, how is our condition benefited by your absence, or by my waiting for you night after night in agony ? Do the babes weep less because they do not see you ? Does that feed, clothe, or console them ? Why leave me, a forlorn woman, without help and without advice ? And why am I to bear the whole burden ?"

"You are right, Luisa. I can only plead in my defence my tenderness for you."

"Your tenderness for me! False, cruel man! Where do you spend your father's allowance?"

"What does all this mean?" cried the bewildered husband.

"Mean! I will tell you. You spend it on your paramour, and on her base-born offspring."

"Luisa, you are raving."

"For me it matters little, because I can go back to my parents; but your poor children? I shall not allude to my past suffering, or to my returning home an altered person. What care you for that? We women are flowers to be plucked and then thrown away."

"My own Luisa, what on earth does all this mean? Speak to me calmly, and listen to me for mercy's sake."

He might as well have attempted to roll back the waters of the Tiber with his hand as to becalm that torrent of passion. She continued with increasing vehemence,—

"Go and live with that creature, go! You will never find one to love as I have loved you. Your wife you may desert, but you ought to have pity on these poor dear innocents. Look at them; they are your own flesh and blood, and you should love them at least as much as those you have begotten with another woman. You should not condemn them to starve."

Giacomo turned his eyes about wildly, and exclaimed after a pause, "Who has poisoned my wife's heart? Ha! the malignity of Don Francesco parts asunder those whom

God hath joined. His breath envenoms me. I feel it subtle, penetrating, and deadly like the plague. But tell me, Luisa, who has calumniated me thus?"

"Calumnies! Is it a calumny that you bought a necklace for your mistress, and a garment braided with silver for your bastard? And the house you had rebuilt for her despicable husband after the conflagration, are all these calumnies?"

"If sorrow did not weigh so heavily on my heart, in faith, Luisa, your words would make me laugh, they are so absurdly ridiculous."

"Ridiculous, are they?" echoed the frantic woman, taking a letter from her breast, and throwing it on the table. "Here, read this."

Giacomo looked at it. It was not signed, badly spelled, and contained information of his connection with a certain carpenter's wife. It told of large sums of money squandered on her, and finally of his having rebuilt her house. But that which pierced the heart of the mother most was the statement that a beautiful boy had lately been born to them, and Giacomo loved him tenderly. The desolate man folded up the letter sorrowfully but calmly, and said, "And can you, Luisa, my own dear wife, place faith in such vile impostures rather than in your own good sense? Will you believe a foul calumniator, who has not even the courage to give you his name—one who acts stealthily to disturb my domestic peace, and rob me thus of my only blessing, your love—rather than believe me, who loves

you dearly, who honours in you the mother of my darlings? When I can affirm and swear”

“Yes, I rather believe that letter than you: it speaks the truth, and you speak falsely.”

“Luisa! for God’s sake recover yourself—our children are listening.”

“Ay, but I tell it you intentionally in their presence; I wish them to learn in time to know their father.”

“Enough, woman! Silence! it is too much. I swear to you by the saints, it is all false!”

“Swear! Did you not swear to me before? O yes! you swore that your father consented to our marriage.”

Giacomo turned pale, and replied in the bitterness of his heart, “The woman for the love of whom I committed that wrong should be the last to reproach me with it. My passion for you is my only palliation”

“But where is your palliation in this instance?”

“Be silent, Luisa; I will explain all when you are calm.”

“I will not be silent.”

“Then I must find means to compel you.”

“Oh, the venom comes out at last! You will get rid of me if I do not hold my tongue? The victim must not even sigh; but I will speak. I will accuse you of your shameful conduct before God and man. You are a traitor, a liar, a villain!”

The poor injured husband could contain himself no

longer ; his reason abandoned him ; he rushed to the corner of the room like a maniac, seized a long rapier, and pointed it at his wife's bosom. Luisa dragged her children towards her and shrieked, "Come on, assassin ! Slay me, and feed your hungry children with my blood !"

Giacomo let the weapon fall, and stretched out his arms to embrace her ; but she repulsed him, exclaiming, "No, never !"

The father then addressed his children : "Tell her, my darlings, that I have always loved her. Persuade your mother that she is mistaken. Embrace me, my children ! Come to my heart ! It is full of bitterness—console me !"

"No," they all cried, "no ! You were going to strike our mother. You are naughty. We do not love you any more. Go away."

"Go away ! Do my children refuse to embrace me ? Do they banish me from my home ? O Lord, I am vanquished !"

Thus, broken-hearted, with both hands in his hair and death in his soul, he left the house. Any one who had seen him in that state, even an enemy, could not have helped exclaiming, "May the Lord be merciful to that man !"

Luisa felt a sort of misgiving in spite of the tempest still raging in her bosom—a misgiving that is generally the forerunner of bitter tears. Alas ! how cruelly will she suffer for having given way to that blind passion, jealousy !

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATHER-IN-LAW.

LUISA hastened to take her cloak, wrapped herself up, and walked resolutely to the palace of her father-in-law. The servants, not knowing her, stared impertinently, and were on the point of refusing to admit her, when Luisa cut short their rudeness by requesting them, in a tone of commanding dignity, to announce to the Count the presence of Donna Luisa Cenci, his daughter-in-law. The menials looked much embarrassed, as either compliance or refusal might be the cause of their losing their places. They consequently formed a sort of conclave, and decided to cede the honour of introduction to Ciriaco, a lad from the country, who had only been a few days in the Count's service. The plan was suggested by an old butler, who had been in the service of the Jesuits for many years.

"Eccellenza," said Ciriaco, "a young lady who announces herself as your Eccellenza's daughter-in-law requests an audience."

Cenci jumped from his chair, and looked more ferocious than usual.

"Eccellenza," proceeded the lad, wishing to ingratiate

himself with his new master, "it has not escaped my vigilant eye that your relatives are not very welcome, so I was going to refuse."

"Oh! you have observed that, have you?"

"O yes, Eccellenza, and many other things, because I consider it part of my duty to observe all matters concerning my master, on purpose to understand, to foresee, and to fulfil them; but, considering the respect I owe to your noble house, I would not take upon myself to send her away, even at this unusual hour of the evening, without announcing her."

The Count smiled maliciously, allowed the fellow to finish his mean flattery, and then walked towards him and said, "Tell me candidly, what made you suppose that my relations are not in my good graces? It is a great wrong to presume to penetrate the motives of your master, and it is a greater still to presume to interpret them at random. Go to my butler at once, he will pay you your salary; then strip off my livery, and leave my palace this very night."

The servant looked thunderstruck, and asked for forgiveness; but the Count made an imperative motion with his hand and said, "Depart."

Luisa, being then introduced, was going to prostrate herself before her father-in-law, but he prevented her, saying benignantly, "No, my daughter, my ears are not at my feet. We must prostrate ourselves only before our Creator."

"Let me first crave your pardon, father, for not having presented myself before you ere this. I have been told that you banished me from your presence, and, as a Roman lady, my pride was hurt."

"That my first-born, in whom I had centred all my affections and all my pride, should have married without my consent and benediction, caused my fatherly heart to groan profoundly; but as for banishing you from my presence, you, as a Roman lady, should have known that a Roman baron could not be so uncourteous. You are a descendant of a noble house. The limited means of your family would certainly have been no obstacle to my consent to the match, because my house does not require wealth: virtue is preferable in my eyes. Riches are often accompanied by pride and malignity."

"Don Francesco, it pains me much to inculcate my husband while exculpating myself, but Giacomo deceived me. He was overpowered by his passion for me, and affirmed on his oath that you knew of, and consented to, our union, but that you desired that it should not be made public for certain particular reasons of your own."

"There!" exclaimed Cenci, "there is another instance that ruin follows when we neglect the first duties of nature and religion. You were deceived, my child, and I was betrayed. I might reproach you with credulity, and call your parents imprudent; but what have your children to do with that? They are completely innocent at any rate. How many have you?"

"Four angels of beauty and innocence," replied the mother quickly.

"Heaven preserve them!" exclaimed the Count, with much apparent benevolence.

"My father, your kind words encourage me. Be pleased to listen. I came here on purpose to speak to you about your grandchildren, because I am the most desolate of mothers. My own sordid apparel does not affect me, although it exposed me but now to the scorn of your domestics. But my children are naked; they are starving. I have not even bread enough to appease their hunger."

A flood of tears choked her utterance.

"How can that be?" asked Cenci, pretending to be much surprised. "True it is that I have been rather niggardly towards Giacomo of late, because I know from sad experience that my liberality only served to increase his extravagance. My son's prodigality is boundless, and my conscience has always urged me to be cautious in my allowance to him, because I felt that I should have to answer for it some day to my Creator. Fortunately my ancestors have settled the family property in entail, and I mean to follow their wise example, otherwise your children's prospects would cause me great anxiety indeed. It appears to me, however, that with two thousand scudi a year a man can provide the necessities of life for his family, and even indulge in some luxuries."

"But Giacomo affirms to me," answered Luisa, "that

you withhold it from him, and only throw a few scudi at him every now and then, doling them out more like an outrage than a relief to our misery."

"Oh, indeed! he affirms that? Perhaps he swears to it also? Did he not swear that I was cognisant and consenting to his marriage? As for myself, I do not swear the contrary to you, because I have always thought the assertion of a good Christian equivalent to his oath. But I wish you to be convinced of it by examining my books." (Here he opened a large ledger, and pointed to various items with his finger.) "I wish you to see and ascertain whether the allowance settled upon him has been paid or not. That a prodigal son should thus compel his father to justify himself against calumny mortifies me exceedingly; but worse things than this afflict my paternal heart. However, my sorrows must remain buried. I am a very unfortunate old man indeed!" And he put both his hands to his face. Luisa was deeply affected by the expression of such deep sorrow.

The old Jesuit resumed, "Oh, could I but find a heart to feel for me!"

"Father, I also am very miserable; confide in me; my tears will relieve you."

"Worthy, kind soul, my own good daughter, I thank you for your sympathy; but religion commands the wife to cling to the man whom she has chosen for her companion through life. I must abstain from opening my heart to you. Perhaps I have said too much already, and you may

love him less. Oh, Giacomo! what nights of agony your conduct has caused to your old father! We might have lived under the same roof, united, and blessed by Providence. This palace is too large for me; I am lonely and forlorn in it. I am not permitted to embrace my grandchildren, to see their pretty little faces, and to play with them on my knees. My heart yearns towards you; but a stone wall separates us, a wall erected by my transgressing son Giacomo."

"Have the sins of my poor husband so deeply offended you, sir, that forgiveness can find no place in your fatherly heart?"

"I leave you to judge, Luisa; I will only mention a few circumstances. Who dictated that abominable memorial of Olympia, which was the cause of her being torn away from me? Who drew it up, and who presented it, wounding thus my heart, and injuring thus my reputation? It was Giacomo! Who threw himself at the Pope's feet, accusing me of all sorts of abominations? Giacomo, my own son, my flesh and blood!"

Luisa entreated him to calm himself and to forgive, expostulating, "Perhaps you were misinformed, father; things were exaggerated. It is but a common practice among menials to calumniate those who are in disgrace with their master, hoping thereby to gain his favour, and heaping fuel on the flames. Pardon him, father! Remember our Lord has pardoned those who crucified Him, because they knew not what they did."

"But Giacomo knows too well what he does," groaned Cenci; "he grows worse every day. Listen to me, and forgive me if the impetus breaks through the ramparts of my previous resolution of forbearance. But a few days past he came here to pervert the children, Beatrice and Bernardino, by insinuating to them that I was the cause of my dear Virgilio's death. Poor boy! he died of consumption. These recollections overwhelm me; I am haunted by a strong temptation to depart this life. I shall, however, make arrangements for the benefit of your children. Giacomo will not have it in his power to mortgage or to alienate their property."

Luisa, as a prudent mother, felt much pleased by this information; still she could not help observing, "But how about your other children?"

"Beatrice," replied the Count, "has a large dowry settled upon her, and Bernardino will enter the church, where he will obtain large benefices and preferments; our house has livings enough to bestow. As for my other sons, they are well provided for, and require nothing more. They are both united to a powerful lady, who does everything for them. She can do whatever she pleases, and provides for thousands every day. But, if you please, we will defer to some other time our conversation on such matters."

"Before I leave you, Count, I must inform you of the reasons which compelled me to pay my respects to you."

"Speak out, my child."

"I feel deeply grateful for what you intend doing for your grandchildren; but, meanwhile, they are in a state of abject destitution, absolutely in want of the common necessities of life."

"True; I thought not of that. Poor souls! they cannot look to their father for support; he squanders all his money on his concubine, on whom they say he dotes, and on those other children, whom he seems to love far more than his legitimate offspring."

"What do you mean, Count? Where did you learn this?" exclaimed Luisa, seizing his arm.

"My dear daughter, you do not know, perhaps, that a father is no less jealous of his son's reputation than a wife of her husband's affection."

Luisa sighed heavily.

"Donna Luisa, I will supply you willingly with the necessary funds for the maintenance of your family, on condition that you bind yourself upon your oath to fulfil certain stipulations which I shall dictate. Your children will be benefited thereby. I foresee that you will forgive your husband. A tear or a kiss will calm the fiercest matrimonial storm. Giacomo will then get possession of the money, and of the information whence it came; and then, instead of providing for my grandchildren, he will again squander it on that abandoned woman. This must not be. You must not let him know that you possess any money, and still less must he be allowed to entertain any suspicion that it came from me. You understand my

motives, and therefore you must swear by this holy cross that you will not betray the secret."

"Count, there is no necessity to bind me down by so solemn an oath; but I will swear since you wish it."

"Good!" resumed Cenci, opening a drawer full of gold pieces, and inviting Luisa to take as many as she wished; but, on perceiving her hesitation, he added, "Come, come, my child, take them. Between father and daughter there must not be any false shyness. Oh! you will not take them? I see I must give them to you myself." He filled a purse and gave it to her.

Luisa blushed, and was pouring forth her gratitude, when he interrupted her with much benignity, saying, "One more word, my dear Luisa. Giacomo is my son still in spite of his misconduct. Bring the prodigal back to me, close your eyes to his infidelity, forget that he lavishes every luxury on that other woman, and allows his legitimate children to suffer from want. Perhaps you will convert him, and bring him back to his sacred duty and to me. My arms are open for him; my heart is ready to forget everything in a sincere, repentant embrace. You will then have restored a son to me; you will recover a husband for yourself, and a father for your babes."

"Don Francesco, no words of mine can express my astonishment, affection, and gratitude. May this devoted kiss on your paternal hand bear witness that I can never be sufficiently thankful!"

CHAPTER X.

THE BANQUET.

Cenci. Welcome, my friends and kinsmen ; welcome, ye
 Princes and cardinals, pillars of the church,
 Whose presence honours our festivity !
 I have too long lived as an anchorite ;
 An evil word is gone abroad of me ;
 But I hope that you, my noble friends,
 When you have shared this entertainment here,
 And heard the pious cause for which 'tis given,
 And we have pledged a health or two together,
 Will think me flesh and blood as well as you ;
 Sinful, indeed, for Adam made all so,
 But tender-hearted, meek, and pitiful."

SHELLEY.

A BANQUET of royal magnificence was being prepared at the Cenci palace. Tables were laid out in a large saloon, whose walls were adorned with the masterpieces of the greatest painters. Entablatures of gold and white satin were suspended on verd-antique pillars, ornamented with graceful arabesques. Between the columns were mirrors full eight yards in length, furnished by the Venetian factories, so justly celebrated at that period ; their frames richly moulded into cupids, flowers, fruit, and birds. The eight entrances to this gorgeous saloon were lined with embroidered curtains of white satin and gilt flowers, the

centre of each exhibiting the time-honoured escutcheon of the Cenci family.

Words cannot paint the enchantment produced on the senses by the perfume of the flowers, the innumerable wax torches blazing in the massive silver candelabra, the unsurpassable splendour of the plate, ewers, jugs, urns, vases, statues, and grotesques, of the most admirable workmanship.

The Italian patricians of our days no longer possess those precious relics of a feudal age. They have been sold to strangers. What would not our patricians sell if they could but find purchasers? These haggling chafferers who infest our country do us more harm even than the hated German. The robber-soldier steals, but leaves us the hope of recovery; but the foreigner who bargains for the relics of our ancestors filches from us in each purchase a portion of our heart and country. Pillage prepares us for liberty by urging us to vengeance; but the nation that can stoop to sell its penates for filthy lucre is rapidly descending to slavery and degradation. The Spartans inflicted heavier punishment on the seducer than on the ravisher, and they were right; for violence contaminates the body only, whilst seduction sullies both body and soul.

Don Francesco received his guests with great courtesy. Several of the Colonna family were amongst the earliest arrivals; then came Sta. Croce, Onofrio, Prince dell'Orto, and Don Paolo, with whom my readers are already acquainted; Monsignor the Treasurer; Cardinals Sforza and

Barberini. There were three more guests; but tradition has not handed down their names. Donna Lucretia, Beatrice, and Don Bernardino also sat at the festive board. Beatrice was dressed in white, a rose in her hair her only ornament.

According to the custom of those days Count Cenci addressed his guests in the following bombastic speech:—

“Welcome, my noble friends! Welcome, my worthy relatives! Eminent cardinals! you bright luminaries of Rome and of the world! had I a hundred tongues, and the lungs of iron that Homer speaks of, I should still be incompetent to thank you sufficiently for the great honour you have deigned to bestow on me and my house.”

“Noble Count,” replied Curzio Colonna, in the same loathsome style, originally introduced by the Spaniards, “your noble house is so elevated that no other rays are required to make it conspicuous.”

“Honoured Don Curzio, you are so rich in the treasures of benevolence that I am only too much flattered by your kind partiality; still you must condescend to accept my warmest thanks. Good signors, I have almost become a stranger to you, and have been restrained from seeking the pleasure of your society by my fears lest you might take me for one just returned from the cave of Trophonius. But I must claim your indulgence. A dreadful calamity has occurred, which I have studiously locked up in my heart to avoid Pandora’s mishap when she imprudently opened the box, and let

loose so much evil on the world. Sorrow resembles that fine subtle dust raised by the simoom; it penetrates everywhere, and oppresses and enervates our physical as well as mental faculties. The sorrowful must be driven forth from the tabernacles of Israel like the leprous—they must not be admitted amongst the votaries of Anacreon. I allude to my venerated friends the prelates, for whom I profess so profound a respect. I may be less ceremonious with the laics. If I have refrained from seeking repose in self-destruction, it is because the act of suicide should be the very last resource against desperate evils. Moreover, it is a wise maxim to think twice about a thing that we can only do once in our lives; so I lived on as well as I could, without afflicting your kind sympathies by my presence. A ray of light has since illuminated the darkness of my soul, so I shake the ashes from my head and live again amongst you. During the winter we cannot make roses bloom: that gentle flower dislikes the snow. Still in our *Alma Italia* roses flourish in every season, and there is my daughter Beatrice, a living proof of my assertion. But what do I see? What strange fancy has seized you, Beatrice? Why place a faded flower in your hair? Do you fear the contrast between a freshly gathered rose and your cheeks? Cease, my dear child, to fear a comparison in which you are certain of victory."

The eye of Beatrice flashed at the speaker, and her cheek mantled with a crimson blush.

"Count," said Don Onofrio, "we have accepted your

invitation as friends and relatives to share in your happiness: it must be of no ordinary description, for I have never known you to be in so gay a humour."

"I plead guilty," replied Cenci, "of not having provided myself with such humour long ago; but there is a time for everything, as King Solomon said, which implies that there is also a time for murder. Suppose, for argument's sake, you quench your thirst with a glass of water containing a dose of Tophana, or of any of the other poisons with which Pope Alexander VI., of holy memory, became so thoroughly familiar"

Here he was interrupted, with some asperity, by the treasurer. "Count, your gaiety seems to me rather ill-timed and inappropriate, more especially as death has lately visited your noble family."

"There now, Monsignore, we cannot let a recollection fall to the ground, but some good-natured friend must pick it up and piously restore it, saying, 'You have dropped a bitter thought from your mind—put it back in its place.' However, no one is surprised at such kindness; least of all you, Monsignore, who hold so high a place in matters of religion. But I take my examples from high authority; I have copied King David, who exclaimed, 'I fasted and wept while he lived, thinking that the Lord might restore him; but now that he is dead why should I fast? Can I call him back? I shall always go towards him, but he cannot return to me.'"

At this impious hypocrisy Beatrice was observed to shudder.

"Come, Count," exclaimed several of the guests, "we are anxious to participate in your gaiety by being informed of its cause."

"My noble friends, say that you wish to satisfy your curiosity, and you will speak more sincerely. But I intend not to give my information to empty stomachs. No, signori, never. You know that the Lord sends down His refreshing dews at morn and even-tide, but not at noon, when the plants and flowers are scorched. Be pleased to season yourselves first with the gifts of Ceres and Bacchus, as our poet laureate would say, and then you will hear my revelation. *Evangelium secundum comitem Franciscum Cincium*.

'To the feast, then, my noble guests, to the feast.'

Donna Lucretia and Beatrice exchanged looks of utter amazement, while the Count laughed. He seated himself at the head of the table, placing his family on either side of him, and his guests according to their rank and dignities.

The banquet was copious and exquisite. One huge dish represented the Coliseum, another a ship of war. A monster cake had the form of a fortress, and when cut open set free a number of birds, which flew in every direction, and filled the air with melody. An enormous pie gave birth to a curious dwarf attired as a pope, who

gravely strutted about, distributed the apostolic benediction, and then disappeared.

After a brisk circulation of the bottles of Cyprus, Malaga, and Alicante, one of the guests resumed, "Count, it is now time to communicate to us the cause of this splendid entertainment, and of your own joyous humour."

Cenci commenced in a solemn voice, "You all know, noble signori, that by my directions seven tombs have been erected in the church of St. Thomas. They are all of white marble and elegant workmanship. But this you do not know : I have prayed that the Lord may allow me to bury all my seven children there before my own decease, and then I made a vow to burn my palace, my church, and all the sacred ornaments in a bonfire for so great a favour. Had I been Nero I should have taken an oath to set fire to Rome a second time."

The guests were thunderstruck, and whispered to each other that the Count must have indulged in too much wine.

Beatrice had nearly fainted—her face was as pale as the faded rose in her hair. The monster continued, "I buried one child but a short time ago ; two more I have the happiness of burying now ; two others are in my clutches, which is tantamount to being buried ; so you see the Lord has granted me such manifest proofs of His favour, that the crowning grace will appear in the complete fulfilment of my prayer."

"Count," said Colonna, "you should have selected a

subject somewhat less revolting for your guests ; it is but a poor amusement to inspire terror."

"Read these letters, then, my friend Colouna, and you will find that two of my detested sons have died at Salamanca ; and mark how they died. Will his Holiness still condemn me to pay them an allowance ? Truly a merciful, kind Pope is Aldobrandino."

The treasurer trembled with indignation, and said, "Noble signori, pay no attention to the ravings of intoxication or delirium. Were it otherwise the Lord would have caused the roof to fall in and crush him who has uttered such fearful sentiments."

"The roof," retorted Cenci, smiling, "respects, perhaps, the beautiful pictures, or the heads of the eminent cardinals of the holy church. Besides, have we not seen a thunderbolt kill a priest while celebrating mass, and spare a thief who was robbing the altar ? You, of all others, Monsignor Treasurer, should feel rejoiced that the Lord regards my words as little as your acts. If He is deaf to me He must be blind for you."

The ferocious Amphytrion seemed to exult in the horror he had inspired, and proceeded :—

"Perhaps you wish to know how my sons died ; I will tell you. Felice, a very young man, was reciting his prayers one evening in the church of the Madonna del Pilastro. Our mater misericordiæ, to let him know that his prayers were heard, ordered a beam from the roof to fall upon his head and gently split his skull. On the

very same evening Cristoforo, my other son, was stabbed by a jealous husband. Now, considering the hour and manner of their death, I look upon all men who should presume to deny that Providence has listened to my prayer as incurable heretics worthy of excommunication."

The guests made signs to each other to depart. Beatrice looked transfixed, Lucretia sobbed, and Bernardino concealed his face in her lap.

All rose from table, and Prince Colonna said, "Let us depart quickly, for the wrath of God will soon overtake this impious house."

"*Amen, dico vobis, quia unus vestrum me traditurus est,*" quoted the Count, smiling blandly.

Actuated by a sudden impulse, all lifted their hands in malediction and horror, as if in the act of stoning the blasphemer.

"Hold, signori, hold!" roared Cenci. "What means this? Are you going to rehearse a tragedy? Why affect such dislike to blood, Monsignori Cardinals, while you dress in crimson? You are but charlatans, who sell crucifixes as antidotes at a fair; Pharisees, who would compel the Lord, were He to return to the world, to take refuge at Mecca or Medina, and become a Mahommedan. I know you well, my noble friends and relatives. I am a necromancer, and can cause the dead to speak. You understand me; but I cannot allow you to leave my house thus uncereemoniously. You must honour me a little longer, and join me first in a toast given as a holo-

caust of my revenge: 'To the death of all my children.' Nay, you turn away? You seem somewhat troubled. I see I must give you leave to depart."

"He is raving mad," said the treasurer; "I have always considered him wicked enough to make the angels weep."

"Say rather," rejoined Colonna, "to make Satan grind his teeth. We must chain him as we would some ferocious animal."

After his diabolical toast Cenci sat down quietly; but, on seeing his guests surround him in a menacing attitude, he raised his head and cried, "Olympio!"

In an instant the guests themselves were surrounded by a number of bandits armed to the teeth. Cenci resumed calmly, "You are learned men, *monsignori*, and should remember the feast given by Domitian to the senators; but fear not; I shall not give the order, 'Out with the fruit!' Imprudent men! Know you not that if Francesco Cenci is no longer the hot iron he was in his youth, he is still warm enough to scorch you all? Remember that my vengeance is the sealed letter of a king—it contains death. You may depart now; but if you care for the soundness of your throats you will not allow a word to escape you, otherwise life will escape with it."

When they were on the point of leaving, some in horror, some in disgust, but all in indignation, Beatrice started as if awakening from a dream, and thus invoked them:—

"*Monsignori*, are you of Roman blood? Can an old

man and a few brigands terrify you thus? Will you leave two poor women and a child in the power of a maniac—doves in the clutches of the vulture? You heard him confess it. He proposes to kill us, and you do not interfere. Will you not protect us? Oh, signori! were it only death I should not thus implore you on my knees; but I fear worse than I dare tell. Cavaliers! when you buckled on the sword you took oath to defend the widow and orphan. We are in a worse plight than orphans, for orphans are only fatherless, whilst our father is our murderer. Noble cavaliers! Christian fathers! in mercy remove us—take us to your houses!”

“My dear daughter,” said one of the cardinals, “we can only pray for you.” Others offered similar words of comfort, words as efficacious as holy water sprinkled on a coffin.

After they were gone Cenci asked Beatrice, “Are you now convinced that right is might, and might is right? You may look about you, but you will find there is no refuge but in my arms. Nestle there, terrible girl; nestle there, and you will find an asylum.”

“Father, I neither hate nor fear you. I see that the Lord has created in you a scourge; like famine, pestilence, and war. That scourge has fallen upon me. I bow my head to His mysterious decrees without a murmur. Having lost all hope of succour from man, I approach nearer to His throne, and put my entire faith in His holy mercy. The only kindness I crave is that you will kill me at your feet.”

The desolate girl fell on her knees, joined her hands in prayer, and expected the blow. That blow Cenci struck not, but made an effort to throw his arms round her. She started up suddenly, and thrust him back with violence, giving utterance to a scream of horror—a scream that reverberated from hall to hall.

That shriek had power to appal even Francesco Cenci, who fancied he saw something like a flash of lightning.

Beatrice seized his arm convulsively, and dragged him from the spot with superhuman strength, saying, "Come, miserable man, come! You have not a moment to lose; death spreads its wings over you; the measure of your iniquities is brimful, and drags you down! Put on sackcloth, old man; cover your head with ashes—you have sinned enough! Pause, or your prayers will reach heaven no more, but will recoil on your head like a hailstorm of perdition. Pray on your knees—repent—save your soul! Be speedy—the edge of the grave is slippery. Consider, it is a question of your eternal weal or woe."

"True, my dear child, you will lead me to paradise. I will come this very night to your chamber, and we will pray together."

Beatrice relinquished his arm and shrank back. His words, looks, and acts of infamy had power to extinguish all her fervour, and she fled in despair, uttering the solemn words, "Lost, lost! past redemption—lost!"

Don Francesco filled another goblet of Cyprus and emptied it at a draught.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONFLAGRATION.

DREADFUL was the fate of the carpenter and his family. The husband, wife, and child slept in a room over the shop. They slept; but the woman's slumbers were disturbed by a horrible dream. She felt as though a monster in the form of a crocodile, with eyes of fire, was clenching her body with its hind legs, and endeavouring to strangle her with its paws. She could neither move nor scream; her vision was distorted; she fancied she saw two burning globes, now violet-coloured, then changing into a deep yellow, like the flames of spirit of wine.

The arteries of her temples beat spasmodically. After a painful struggle she succeeded in opening her eyes, and perceived something licking the floor like a serpent of fire—flames oozed out of every division of the boards, and the whole room was full of smoke.

"Fire, fire!" cried the affrighted woman, throwing her arms about her in wild consternation, and jumping from her bed to lift her child from the cradle.

"Fire!" echoed the terrified husband, darting to the window to throw it open. The air rushing in increased the

flames, and made the smoke and heat intolerable. He quickly returned to his wife, put his arm round her waist, took the child in the other, and conducted them towards the staircase, the stone steps of which were already red-hot and crumbling.

The fire on the ground floor raged like a vortex in a whirlwind, the shop having been full of wooden planks and shavings.

Forward! forward! If they can but reach the shop-door without being suffocated or burnt alive! They approach—one more step and they can touch it. They touch it; but O God of heaven! they cannot open it—they shake, pull, and rush against it—alas, all in vain! it is firmly secured from without. The strength of the wretched father is exhausted—his heart is ready to burst with grief and despair. The miserable mother extinguishes the child's flaming night-dress with her bare hands. They both turn round and round, and seem at a loss what to do. He endeavours to re-ascend the steps; the woman follows him, screening sometimes the child and sometimes her husband from the flames.

On reaching the upper room again his breathing becomes more difficult; his eyes flash death; he makes a desperate effort, but staggers; tries to speak, but cannot; and falls senseless to the ground. His last look reveals the desolation of his heart.

In that frightful moment the despairing wife scarcely looks at her husband—the husband once so dear to her: all

her thoughts are concentrated in her child. She reaches the window, and utters a shriek so painfully acute, so desperately shrill and savage, that it pierces the hearts of the crowd underneath like the stab of a poniard.

They see a figure like one of the Eumenides—a black shadow enveloped in smoke and fire ; and feeling both fear and compassion, they consult amongst themselves, and come to the conclusion that nothing can be done except to collect a little money to get masses celebrated for the benefit of the souls of the victims. However, amongst that cowardly crowd happened to be Donna Luisa, who, urged by jealousy, had been wandering about in front of the carpenter's house for several nights in man's attire, in the hope of detecting her faithless husband. An ingenious self-tormentor, she persisted in cherishing a fatal error rather than convince herself of the simple truth. Such is human weakness. Placing faith in evil, we cling to a false conception, let the error be ever so offensive to our sense and dignity.

Luisa saw the conflagration, and considered it a divine judgment, as, according to her belief, that house had been erected by guilty means. Some of the people had, nevertheless, procured ladders and ropes ; but nobody dared ascend the blazing window at which the despairing mother was shrieking,—

“Save my child !”

That shriek penetrated Luisa's heart, and aroused all the tender feelings of a mother. Quick as

thought she applied the ladder to the wall, and exclaimed,—

“Come along, my men, come! It is but for a moment, and not difficult. Romans, whoever will mount and save them shall have a hundred ducats. Come, Christians, courage! Save them—a hundred ducats!”

The fear of danger overpowered their cupidity. None advanced.

“Will no one help?” she again exclaimed. “Stand aside, then, and may God assist me.”

So saying, she boldly ascended the ladder, the bars of which were already smoking, reached the window, and received the child in her arms. Luisa descended, gave the child to a young peasant who stood at the foot of the ladder, and then ascended a second time. The bars were completely burning by this time, but the courageous woman again reached the top in safety, and offered her arms to the woman, although she fancied her the pilferer of her husband’s affections.

That generous embrace was contemplated and registered above, for human eyes have never beheld a nobler act of Christian charity.

“Quick, my fine lad! quick—come down!” shouted the mob; “the ladder is on fire, the bars are breaking; descend, or you are lost!”

Scarcely had the heroine touched the earth again and delivered her load, half dead, when the whole building came down with a tremendous crash. A shriek is heard. They

are supposed to be buried in the ruins, but they emerge unhurt, and a frantic shout of joy reaches to the opposite side of the Tiber.

"Who is the brave youth?"

"I do not know him."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Never."

"He has no beard yet—he is only a boy."

"Hurrah for the gallant youth!"

"He is a true Roman—hurrah!"

And the dastardly crowd dispersed.

It had pleased Providence to be merciful to the wife; but as yet she was ignorant of the dreadful fate of her husband.

Luisa would not allow her whom she had saved to be carried to the hospital. She had offered some of the ducats obtained from Count Cenci to save her, and now thought of completing the good work by spending them for her recovery. She proposed to have her taken to her own house if a board or a mattress could be procured. She found no lack of offers of assistance now. The child she would carry herself, provided somebody would escort her, as she began to wax faint.

An athletic fellow pushed through the crowd and offered his services. His head and face were covered with long hair, and his dress was that of the Campagna di Roma.

"Lean on me, young man," he said in so mild a manner, that it formed a strong contrast with his savage

appearance; "lean on me, my fine young fellow; I have strength enough to carry the column of Trajan. If you will give me leave I'll carry both you and the child."

"Thank you, my friend, that will do. Guide me and that poor burnt woman to the Via St. Lorenzo, and then ask for the house of Cenci."

"Cenci did you say?" asked the rustic, drawing back.

"Yes, Cenci. What surprises you? What right have you to think that we are not charitable?"

The man shook his head, but made no reply, upon which Luisa became much irritated, and said,—

"I must tell you, then, who dared to mount the ladder, while you men had not the heart to stir. I will tell you: it was a woman, the wife of Giacomo Cenci, and the daughter-in-law of Count Francesco Cenci."

The man looked confused and bewildered; it was no other than our old acquaintance, Olympio, the very perpetrator of that horrible crime. He had not offered his services from hypocrisy, nor from a desire to conceal his guilty act, since the circumspection he had used precluded almost the possibility of its being supposed anything but an accident; but, strange to say, Olympio felt inspired by the magnanimous conduct of Luisa. No human being is so utterly perverted by vice as to be wholly unsusceptible of generous emotions.

The moment Luisa reached her house she prepared bedding, oil, flour, and other remedies for burns, and then went in search of a surgeon, and a woman to nurse the

child till its own mother should recover. The poor soul was delirious all night, crying bitterly, and screaming desperately, as the harrowing episodes of the dreadful scene through which she had passed presented themselves to her disturbed imagination. She was much better in the morning, and, recovering her faculties by degrees, asked for her boy, and was informed that he slept in a little bed close to hers, upon which she tried to turn round, but was prevented by pain. "For mercy's sake do not deceive me!" she exclaimed in agony; but, on obtaining a positive assurance of the safety of her child, she burst into tears and inquired for her husband. She was charitably told that, having been in a very bad state, he was taken to the hospital, where great hopes were entertained of his ultimate recovery.

Luisa, still in male attire, had watched by her bedside all that night, consoling, and begging not to afflict herself so cruelly, as it would only increase the suffering, and prevent her from embracing her child again. The last argument had the effect of restoring her to tranquillity.

Luisa felt an extraordinary affection for the desolate widow. As offences beget the desire to injure, so does kindness stimulate us to bestow still greater benefits.

Nevertheless she was a woman, and as such was anxious to know the particulars of her husband's amours; but many considerations prevented her from attempting the discovery.

In the first place, she did not consider it right to take advantage of the wretched state of her rival to extort a secret from her. Secondly, a doubt had taken possession of her mind regarding her suspicion, so she preferred to oscillate between her doubts rather than rush upon the terrible confirmation of her fears.

About a week had elapsed when Luisa was seated by the convalescent's bedside, contemplating her youth, returning bloom, and general comeliness. She felt her heart palpitating with jealousy, and could not resist asking, "Tell me, Angiolina, am I the only protector that you have?"

"Who else but an angel like you would care for a poor creature like me?"

"Perhaps your memory is still weak, Angiolina; try and recollect yourself."

"O yes, I remember now, ungrateful that I am! We have another protector who has done us much good, the Count Cenci."

"Cenci, Cenci, did you say? Cenci!" screamed Luisa, as if a serpent had bitten her.

Angiolina, to make amends for her involuntary ingratitude, added, "The most generous man I have ever seen. It was he who had our house rebuilt; he gave me money to buy handsome dresses; and he reproached me, moreover, for not having chosen him to be my child's godfather."

Luisa bit her lips, and left the room abruptly for fear of betraying herself.

CHAPTER XII. AND XIII.

THE CAVERN.

THE night was far spent when Count Cenci was reclining on a sofa in his studio, reading Aristotle concerning the nature of animals. He paused every now and then, reflected, and made notes on the margin.

The clock struck two. Its reverberation sounded sharply in the lonely silence of the night.

"Who was the inventor of the division of time," he asked himself, "thus marking the hours, the minutes, and the seconds? Whoever he was he rendered a poor service to the world. I can understand a man leaning his head out of his travelling carriage to see the milestones; but when the town he is approaching is Necropolis he had better not know the distance: *motus in fine velocior*. Everything is in contrast, disorder, and confusion in this world. We are at war with ourselves. Posterity will scarcely know that I have existed. Our terrible ancestors have not even left us the means to immortalise ourselves in guilt. Oh, Tiberius! Nero! Domitian! you have forestalled all future misdeeds; you have drunk so deeply of the rivers of lust and ferocity, that but few drops are left to quench

our thirst. Had fortune given me an empire, or even a pontificate, I still think I could have excelled them all.

At that moment a cautious knock was heard at the secret door, and Olympio, with his head bandaged and marked with blood, crept into the studio, looking wildly around like a person apprehensive of being followed. Don Francesco, though expert in dissimulation, could not resist expressing his surprise and annoyance. "Why come at such an hour? What devil has dressed you up in those garments? Whence your wound? What obstacles have you met with?"

"Treachery, Don Francesco, treachery. But I swear by the apostles Peter and Paul to strangle the ugly Judas, even if he should be my own father."

"Olympio, my friend, be calm; sit down, and tell me distinctly what has happened."

"When I had finished my work at the carpenter's—By the by, Eccellenza, do you know that the poor devil was burnt alive? We never thought about that."

"Satan must have done the deed," said Cenci, sarcastically; "of course it was Satan that secured the shop-door outside by fixing a strong bar across it."

"Oh! that I did myself—I can swear to it; but I only wanted him not to escape readily, and get the neighbours to help him to extinguish the fire. I never thought that those little packets you had prepared could have burnt so quickly; nor did I suppose that he would lose his head, and run about the house rather than to the window; in short, I'

never dreamt that so much mischief would have resulted. Don Francesco, have you heard the deed of your daughter-in-law ? There is Latin blood for you !”

“I know all that, Olympio. She certainly is a courageous woman, but do not let us say any more about it.”

“That is easily said, Count ; but I felt as if my heart was going to split, and I wept like a child. I thought of my mother, and of poor Clelia when she waited for me at the fountain. In short, I thought of mending my life when I saw that heroic act, and the wonderful coincidence that a Cenci woman should save them. I have done so much evil in this world that I must remedy it somehow. The money I took from the curate at your command would do it, perhaps. I could employ it in having masses celebrated for the soul of the carpenter, and then I would provide for the poor widow. Surely it was no sin to steal the money from the priest, because you told me that you only gave it to him as a joke ; and as for his own paltry forty pounds, of course I was not going to break into his house, and then leave them behind. I was entitled to them : the accessory must go with the principal. “I had dressed myself up as a mendicant, walked about the vicarage, and, after having examined the place minutely, I quietly penetrated into the house towards the middle of the night, and soon became master of the money. I had remarked the donkey you had mentioned : he pleased me, so I made up my mind to borrow him for my journey back. When I was going to mount him the brute began to kick

as if he wanted to demolish a mountain. 'Oh ! you are for war, are you ? War you shall have, then,' said I to him, giving him kicks and blows with a vengeance. The battle lasted for some time, when at last he ceased kicking and bent his ears, which meant that he wished to capitulate. 'Pardon to the vanquished,' said I, 'provided you let me mount.' He was quiet enough now, and we began our journey as good friends, just as if there had been no hostilities between us. When the day broke I noticed the wallets attached to the saddle, and, as the money began to feel heavy in my pockets, I put it all in these wallets and made for the woods, intending to reach Rome at dark. By this time my friend the donkey had gained my confidence, and I thought I could trust him. Fool that I was to trust a donkey ! On reaching the middle of a river that we had to ford the donkey suddenly laid down, and then taking advantage of my ducking, he quickly turned back and ran like a deer. The following night I tried to get to the curate's house again, recover my money, and tell my friend the donkey my opinion of him ; but the house was guarded by dogs and peasants. So you see, Eccellenza, I find myself a loser by the expedition, not having a bajocco left to do either good or evil. My only chance of earning something again was that adventure of the young duke ; but the carrying off a girl is such child's play. She would have rather liked it, because the duke, being so desperately in love, may make her his legitimate wife after all, and then she would be very much obliged to me some

day. By all this you see, Count, that my destiny is a strange one. Some people are undone by woman, some by wealth, and some by titles; my fate has been to be ruined by a donkey! But to the point. His grace waited for me and my four companions in a carriage at the corner of the street. I rang the bell of Falconieri's house, and told the porter who opened the gate to have the goodness to call little Lucretia down for a minute, as Joachim was waiting with a message from her mother. The good man went directly, and my four friends entered the yard and concealed themselves behind the columns. The girl hurried down, singing like a lark, and in less time than you could say, 'Ave, Maria!' we had muffled and carried her to the duke's carriage. The coachman drove away at a trot, not to excite suspicions, and we followed as an escort. 'Everything goes well,' said a companion to me, just at the moment that we encountered a strong body of police. 'Turn round, coachman,' cried I, 'and gallop away with all speed.' Malediction! Another body of police came against us from the other direction. 'Boys!' I exclaimed, 'you must break through, or else you will be roasted alive. Out with your swords!' No sooner said than done; even the duke drew his: I should not have given him credit for courage. The police, however, would not wait till we came near enough to make our reverences, but fired a volley, which prostrated a few of our men. Meanwhile, the girl had torn off her gags, and was shouting murder as if we had really wanted to kill her. They were

too many for us, so I ran off with all speed. In spite of the darkness of the night, two of them followed me like greyhounds. The story of the Horatii recurred to me at that moment, so I turned suddenly round and fired my pistol through the heart of one, who had nearly seized my coat. He turned round three or four times like a dog trying to catch his tail, and down he sank. His companion, in return for my polite attention, fired a salute at me, but it only grazed my ear. Thus I got away, and, dodging from street to street, I found myself by chance in your neighbourhood, jumped over the wall of your garden, and present myself to you, Don Francesco, that you may conceal me until to-morrow evening, when I shall again be off to the wood, as the air of Rome evidently disagrees with me."

Having listened to his wild statement in detail, Cenci asked if anybody had seen him get over the wall or enter his palace.

"Nobody," said the bandit. Upon which the Count resumed, after a moment's reflection, "Olympio, I must take care of you; not even my servants must see you. I cannot trust any one with so valuable a friend. I must conceal you in the cellar."

"What! in the caverns?"

"Caverns or cellars, what does it matter, Olympio? I call them cellars because I keep my wines there. I know you do not dislike being in company with casks, and I authorise you to get intimately acquainted with them; they

will cheer you up, and make you forget your mishap. You will not find yourself accommodated like a prince, certainly ; but you will find plenty of straw, and in less than another hour I will bring you victuals, a light, and a certain ointment of mine which will heal your wound. Come, my friend, I will myself conduct you to your hiding-place, where not even the devil will find you."

On reaching the vaults Olympio again hesitated. Cenci asked him jocularly, "Are you, then, afraid?"

"No, but I am thinking that we know when we enter a place, but we know not when we shall get out again. Suppose now, Count, that you should not come to let me out, or that something should happen to you?"

"'Tis only till to-morrow evening, and what benefit should I derive from your death, Olympio? Where could I find a man like you, who serves me with fire and sword?"

"Still, if you never came?"

"Then you would call out: the cellars are close to the streets, and the passengers would hear you."

"A fine prospect, indeed; they would lead me to prison."

"But do not you see, Olympio, that I should be compromised with the authorities for having sheltered such an innocent baby as yourself?"

"There is something in that, but you must not lock the door."

Hereupon Olympio entered; the door turned on its hinges, and was strongly secured without by the wily Count.

"It is astonishing," he soliloquised, on his way back, "that fellow pretends to be cunning. No fox has ever been cleverer in avoiding a trap than he has in escaping the police; yet he is caught now, and may wait a long time for me. Fortune has thrown him into my power, so I will sacrifice a bullock to fortune and a sheep to wisdom."

CHAPTER XIV.

GUIDO GUERRA.

———"Quello-Amico
 Non chiama—Invoca un Dio che l'abbandona
 E la condanna a disperarsi? E desta
 E delira."

ANFOSSI, *Beatrice Cenci*.

PALE as a vestal wandering through the shades of night under the arcades of Paraclete to weep on the tomb of a departed companion, Beatrice, robed in white, and bearing a small lamp in her hand, issued from her father's house to enter the garden. Whither goes the adventurous girl at such an hour? She steps onward stealthily, and looks around her with fear and suspicion. Perhaps she comes forth to admire the immensity of the heavens, where the Almighty has written His glory in the stars; but the sky is encumbered with dark clouds. Comes she forth to list to the melancholy notes of the nightingale? No; for the tempestuous blasts have scared away the romantic warblers. It may be that the desolate girl comes in search of some meteor that may guide her through the darkness of her destiny. Or comes she in search of hope—that flower which dropped upon earth from the gardens of heaven? Alas! it

is a flower too often nipped in the bud before its opening petals exhale its perfume. But why should we hesitate to reveal the truth? Beatrice Cenci came forth into the garden at such an hour to meet a fond and faithful lover. When and how did love first penetrate into that chaste bosom? How could love take root in that desolate heart? I once saw a solitary violet growing on a lofty granite rock, where the vulture rests his tired wings. Whence came the handful of earth on that elevation sufficient to nourish that tender flower? From Providence, who never created a desert without fountains, Alps without flowers, or sorrows without consolations.

The youth whom Beatrice loved was Monsignor Guido Guerra. Tall, handsome, and of a graceful bearing, he was the scion of an illustrious house. He wore priestly garments, but was not bound to the church by any religious vow. According to the custom of the time he might have borne arms and fought in battles, free afterwards either to take orders or to lay down his canonicals and marry. The councils did not approve of similar practices; but the custom was stronger than the council.

Guido was the only son of his widowed mother. He possessed great wealth, and tradition informs us that his mind was highly cultivated.

Beatrice would have shrunk from any attachment that was not strictly legitimate; but that excellent woman, Donna Lucretia, had encouraged it in every way, for she loved her step-daughter tenderly, and strove to secure her

future happiness. Moreover, she felt anxious to rescue her from the contaminating influence of her father's infidel ribaldry and revolting depravity.

Whenever Don Francesco absented himself from Rome Guido assiduously visited Donna Lucretia and Beatrice, and strove to cheer them with his presence and counsels. He loved Beatrice with intense devotion, and had plighted his faith to her, although the Pope was desirous that he should enter the church, having destined him to high functions.

When Don Francesco first obtained information of Guerra's wishes and intentions he admonished him to cease visiting his family, and warned him, on peril of his life, to abandon all idea of marrying his daughter Beatrice. The boldest man in Rome felt his blood run cold at the bare mention of Cenci's name; but Guido would have been indifferent to his threats had he not dreaded lest the breath of scandal should pollute the fair fame of his beloved Beatrice.

He saw her but seldom, and although Pope speaks of letters which

"Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
And waft a sigh from Indus to the pole,"

their mutual passion found correspondence but a poor substitute for those meetings in which they poured forth their vows to each other.

On that night Guido was walking in disguise to and fro under the windows of the Cenci palace. Ever and anon he

cast anxious glances towards Beatrice's apartment to see if he could discern a light there—a light more grateful to his gaze than the beacon to the mariner in a stormy night. Presently a man jostled against him, slipped a letter into his hand, and disappeared.

Guido, seeing a small lamp shedding a dim light near the image of the Madonna, approached it, tore open the letter, and recognised in the handwriting of his beloved Beatrice the following lines:—

“For the love you bear our heavenly Father, come to our garden this very night at one o'clock, and wait for me in the grove of laurels. Fail me not, Guido, if you value my life.”

A prey to gloomy reflections, Guerra returned to his palace. At the appointed hour he took his sword, a ladder of ropes, effected his entrance into the Cenci garden, and concealed himself amongst the laurels.

The iron tongue of time told the Romans that an hour had elapsed since midnight, but Beatrice came not. Another hour rolled by, and still she came not. Guido's anxiety knew no bounds. “Gracious heaven!” he exclaimed, “the misfortune intimated so mysteriously in her letter has overtaken her. Is there no remedy?” And the unhappy youth staggered against a tree, and was giving himself up to despair, when suddenly he heard his name pronounced in a whisper,—

“Guido!”

“Beatrice!”

The bashfulness of the virgin was forgotten as she threw herself on his beloved breast for shelter and protection, exclaiming wildly, "Guido, my own love, save me! Remove me instantly—lose not a moment—the ground burns my feet—the air I breathe here is polluted! Come, Guido, let us hence."

"Beatrice!"

"No words; let us go ere it be too late. Take me to some convent, no matter which—even to the Clarissa's, where the doors are walled after the vow has been taken—only save me, my Guido, I conjure you, I command you! This house is accursed"

"My own beloved Beatrice, what is all this? Your hands are burning with fever—your words, your impetuosity"

"Save me from despair—from eternal perdition! Ask no questions; I cannot answer them. Think of crimes that strike with horror—crimes which would make the hair of a parricide stand on end—crimes too horrible to pronounce—imagine the fable of the Atrides—crimes which would raise a blush on the brow of Satan himself!"

"You fill my soul with horror, Beatrice; but explain"

"How can I explain? How could you listen? If I were to speak I should die of shame at your very feet. Let it suffice for you to know that I, a Roman lady, a maiden, who has never conceived a thought that she could not confess to the recording angel, would rather live the

life of infamy of the lowest of our sex than remain for another hour under this roof, for God's curse is on this house. You, my Guido, are my only hope. Lead me, and I will follow you over the wall."

"Come, then, my own beloved, and may God speed us!"

"What! depart without saluting the master of the house? That were not courteous." It was the voice of Cenci.

The words were accompanied by a blow with a cutlass, which, had it reached Guido, would have cut him in twain.

Guerra drew his sword, but received a violent push from another man, who whispered to him at the same time, "Run for your life, imprudent young man! I will follow and save you."

Guido fled, pursued by the interlocutor, who continued making pretended thrusts, and exclaimed, "Traitor! let us kill him like a dog!"

Pausing on a sudden, Guido began to think of Beatrice and of the wrath of her infuriated parent, and, feeling ashamed of his flight, was on the point of turning back at any risk, when his friendly pursuer again urged him to escape.

"But how about Lady Beatrice?" he anxiously remonstrated.

"A friend will watch over her," replied the man. "At present you would only sacrifice yourself without saving her."

So saying, he helped him over the wall.

Don Francesco came limping after them, foaming with rage, and shouting, "Where is his body? Bring torches that I may behold his wounds. Lights, I say!"

"Eccellenza, he has escaped," said Marzio.

"How escaped? It cannot be—he must be there—we must tear him to pieces. Escaped! You dogs—you traitors! You have allowed him to escape. I can trust nobody, and my lameness disables me. Marzio, I have suspected you for a long time. Look to yourself; you know that my suspicions transform themselves into daggers." Suddenly recollecting himself, as if regretting his imprudence, he added, "Marzio, you have been less zealous of late. I will not retain you in my service any longer. I feel that by parting with you I lose my right hand; still I will submit to dispense with your services rather than find you less faithful and less attentive."

"Eccellenza," remonstrated Marzio, "say rather that you do not like me so well as formerly; because my usual good luck has abandoned me in this instance, all my former services are cancelled in your memory. I must bear it, and will leave your service to-morrow."

Cold-blooded villains are very apt to confide in their cunning and duplicity, and are often deceived themselves.

Cenci fancied he had deceived Marzio, who, we shall find, had outwitted him.

"Marzio," resumed the Count, "these are words spoken in wrath; let them be forgotten. I look upon you as the

most faithful servant in my household, and I will prove it to you shortly."

Diplomatising thus they had returned to the place where Beatrice, faint and motionless, was leaning against a tree.

"Oh! you are that innocent creature," exclaimed her father, "to whom words of love are incomprehensible as those of an unknown tongue? You are that chaste maiden who seemed created for paradise only—too pure for this earth of ours? And yet you give nocturnal assignations to a lover! Tell me, you jade, who was the scoundrel whom you were embracing?"

Beatrice looked at him and was silent.

Enraged at her apparent calmness, he shook her savagely, and howled out,—

"Speak, or I will strangle you!"

Beatrice, unmoved by his threats, answered not a word.

The monster's fury knew no bounds. He uttered words scarcely ever addressed by the guardians of the night to prowling harlots, and struck his young daughter in the face. Oh! let us turn aside from the recital of such brutality.

Beatrice uttered but one word, which seemed to come from the very bottom of her heart, "Fatality!"

"Marzio!" shouted Cenci, "I had intended to leave her in your charge; but, upon reflection, I think that it will be better to guard her myself, lest she should fascinate you. Go to my studio; in a drawer on the

right hand side you will find a bunch of keys—bring them hither.”

Marzio, anxious to offer his assistance to the tortured girl, hurried to execute the command of his master, and, on his return, guided, or rather carried her to the cellar, followed by the Count. As they approached the door they heard stifled groans, and a voice moaning something like :

“To die thus—without absolution—starved ! Oh the traitor !”

“Did you hear a noise, Marzio ?” asked Cenci ; “a voice, as it were, of lamentation ?”

“I fancied that I did,” replied the man ; “but it must have been the wind.”

“No, no, Marzio ; they are the groans of ghosts, because my grandfather kept an enemy imprisoned there, and left him to starve like Ugolino. Ever since that period it is said that the cellars are haunted by spectres, and I believe it.”

“Domine, protect us !” exclaimed Marzio. “I would not enter them even with an *agnus Dei* in my pocket.”

“You are right, Marzio. Now open the lock of the third door.”

Marzio obeyed. Cenci pushed poor Beatrice violently into the cell, bidding her to eat the bread of penitence, and drink the waters of sorrow. He then locked the door on the outside and departed.

The desolate, bruised, and bleeding girl fell on the pavement and fainted. On recovering she crawled towards the

wall and repeated faintly, "Fatality, Oh fatality! God has abandoned me. No living soul can help me, none. Fate hangs over me like a pall. I am struck down. Oh, my Guido! Alas! he is dead. They have murdered him! He is now with my dear Virgilio in heaven. They are talking of their poor lost Beatrice, and are waiting for me. Oh Lord God, lay not Guido's death to my charge! My love for him was very deep and devoted. I may confess it now without being ashamed. He would join his fate to mine, although my days flow on like the waters of desolation. Death follows their course. God forgive me! but why do I live? It is said that we must not destroy ourselves—our souls must feel and suffer, but not rebel; and I am bound to bear my fate, although I feel that it is productive of misery to all who love me. My years are beginning to dilate like the branches of the upas tree, destroying those who venture to rest under its shadow. Were it not, then, a good deed to tear up a poisonous plant from the earth? The soul! Does, then, the Almighty keep it as a target for His anger in this world and in the next? No, the Lord of mercy will not persecute us throughout eternity. Besides, were I doomed to suffer the torments of the condemned, they cannot be greater than those that I suffer here. In any case I shall avoid pollution, escape infamy, and I shall not be the cause of others becoming criminal. Oh God! you loaded the shoulders of your Son with a cross of wood, and thrice He fell under its weight; on mine you lay a cross of lead. I have not

strength enough to bear it, so I cast it down. The contract of my existence is too heavy, so I break it."

Arguing thus wildly in the extremity of her distress, despair, and desolation, the unfortunate girl rushed head foremost against the wall. Alas, alas! she staggers—she sinks down motionless!

CHAPTER XV.

ANNA RIPARELLA.

AFTER a short pilgrimage of fifteen years here upon earth the desolate Beatrice could find no asylum save in the valley of the shadow of death. Death would have been a mercy to her ; but Providence destined her to still greater trials. How many hours she remained in that miserable condition we are not able to state.

When she regained her consciousness she was leaning against the wall, unaware of the place where she lay, or how she got there.

She was pressing her bleeding brow with her hand, and could not account for the acute pain which she felt.

Suddenly she heard her name pronounced. She listened. Was it the voice of Virgilio? The dead boy appeared before her distorted imagination. "Thanks, my dear brother," she exclaimed, "thanks. You are come to save me from eternal perdition. Thanks, my love! But come, let me see you—let me embrace you! Is my Guido with you also? Oh! how young he died; but he will not regret his life now that I may kiss him. May I not kiss him, my mother, even in your presence? You know he

was my betrothed." The voice she had heard became more distinct; it was that of Marzio, who said,—

"Oh, my Lady Beatrice! recover yourself. Take courage; it is I."

"Marzio? That was the name of a certain faithful servant of ours, who once loved and protected me. May God reward him for it! But is poor Marzio dead also? My fate has been contagious to all who were kind to me."

"Donna Beatrice, recover yourself, for God's sake! That infamous old man . . . the Count is asleep now, and shall never awake again if you desire it."

"Marzio, I do not understand you—my head is wandering."

"The man who gave you life, your father, will kill you. I can prevent it this very night—his life is in my hands."

"No, no," cried Beatrice, recovering her reason by degrees. "Marzio, beware, or I will denounce you. I should hate you. Let him live and repent: he must repent some day."

"He will never repent, my lady! If *he* lives *you* will die."

"Be it so; I care not; I wish to die; I attempted it but now. Oh, how poignant is the agony of returning to life! Marzio, my faithful friend, death is welcome to me. You may have read of our ancestors, who were wont to keep some trusty servant attached to them to strike the fatal blow when they felt that their hour was come. I will not ask so great a service at your hands, but you

must procure me some drug that will close my eyes for ever."

"You must not die, poor dear lady! Do not allow your despair to mislead you. I will come back to you very shortly. At present I must return to your horrible father, for if he wakes he may suspect me, and then all is lost."

Marzio wept aloud, he was so deeply affected by the miserable condition of his young mistress. Before leaving the cavern he remembered the groans of the previous night, and gave a slight knock at the different doors. Presently he heard the lamentation,—

"Oh, to die of hunger and thirst, it is frightful! Had I been hung—a fate that I always expected—it would have been well; I should have confessed, and been absolved according to custom. But"

"Who are you?" asked Marzio. "Answer quickly."

"You know who I am, Eccellenza. Open quickly; I feel as if I could eat my own hands!"

"Explain at once," said Marzio again, "or I must leave you."

"Well, I am a man who keeps an open account with justice about some trifles; but I am an honourable bandit in other matters, and, above all, I am faithful to my employers. My name is Olympio. Count Cenci has locked me in here some three days past; he promised to return, but has treacherously left me to die here unaided. If you are a Christian give me in mercy a drop of water, a morsel of bread, and a light. Oh, have pity!"

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Marzio. "What! condemn a man to die of hunger? The soul of that demon is like the fathomless abyss of Malebolge. Listen, Olympio! I have not the keys with me, but I will return shortly and bring them. Have patience yet a little longer."

"Who are you?" groaned the sufferer.

"I am Marzio. I will save you as soon as possible. Meanwhile, farewell."

"My old comrade Marzio? Oh! come back quickly, or else I shall be dead."

The exertion in the garden had inflamed Cenci's leg—he was unable to rise. Gnashing his teeth with impotent rage, he exclaimed, "I am obliged to trust to that traitor Marzio. I cannot help myself. Here, Marzio, take these keys, and carry some bread and water to Lady Beatrice—nothing else I charge you. This holy relic I bestow on you; hang it round your neck—it will drive the spectres away if there are any. But if, in spite of it, you should hear any sound, pay no attention; above all, do not approach the left hand cellar, for it was there that my grandfather starved his foe to death."

"Eccellenza, had we not better go together?"

"You see, Marzio, that I cannot move."

Marzio returned to the prison, and offered Beatrice the refreshments which he had been able to collect, informing her, at the same time, that the man she persisted in protecting from his revenge had given him strict orders not to bring her anything but bread and water.

Marzio then expressed his deep concern at not being able to serve her in future, as he intended to leave the Count's service immediately.

"My Guido is dead," exclaimed the distressed girl, "and will you, too, abandon me?"

"Monsignor Guerra is alive, signora," replied Marzio.

A flood of tears came to her relief. She looked Marzio full in the face, and asked again, "My Guido lives, and you will abandon me?"

"Listen to me, Lady Beatrice. I will confess to you that which I would not confess to my own father if he returned from the next world. I have taken service in your father's house on purpose to fulfil a vow, namely, to destroy the Count. His daily iniquities only confirmed my resolution; for it will not only satisfy my own revenge, but it will be a meritorious act in the sight of God and man. You appear afflicted, and shake your head, my lady. It would be vain to try to dissuade me: it must be done. 'With steel he killed, and by steel he shall die.' 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'"

"But how has the Count ever offended you, Marzio?"

"He has slain my soul within me. I cannot forgive him, although I am a great sinner myself. I will not make the Count, your father, appear more criminal than he is in reality; but my tale will contribute to soften your imprecations against his murderer. I am not book-learned, so I will relate the circumstances to you as my heart dictates, and you may believe me as you believe in the Gospel. I

was born at Tagliacozzo. When my father died I was but a child. He left me some land and cattle, but my mother fell ill, and was unable to take care of our little property. As I grew up I unfortunately associated with bad characters, who initiated me in every vice. They won money from me at play, and I soon fell into the clutches of usurers. Within the course of a few years our little property was dissipated, my mother was taken to the hospital, and I was driven forth from my house. Young, corrupted, and without a guide or a counsellor, I made for the forest, and joined some of my former associates. From that day my calendar was marked with blood. Alas! blood intoxicates more readily than wine! God will be my judge whether I could have resisted the demon who got possession of my soul. I will not strive to palliate my crimes: if I deserve His mercy He will pardon me. I repent for what I have done; but repentance is vain, and the fulness of my vengeance must fall upon Count Francesco Cenci. Listen to the reasons which impel me to this last dire deed. After I had joined Marco Sciarra's band, one fine evening I was seated on a stone near the wood, leaning on my musket. Several of my companions had agreed to meet me there, to make our arrangements for the next day's operations, and also to say our 'Aves' at the foot of an old oak tree, where there was a holy image of the Madonna. The setting sun looked scarlet, and the air was hot as the blast from an oven. My conscience smote me, and I was almost afraid to be

thus alone with majestic nature. Suddenly an angelic creature, looking like one of our Madonna's Oh! be not offended, Lady Beatrice, but she much resembled you, only more sunburnt. She bore an amphora on her head, and came to fetch water at the fountain hard by. I could not help saluting her; she returned my salute, stared at my appearance and weapons, but did not seem at all afraid. She knew that her poverty secured her from theft, and she carried a stiletto in her hair to protect herself against violence. After wishing me a good evening she said with deep feeling, 'May God protect you!' and then walked on. I looked after her as long as I could see her, and then thought of her figure, her bearing, her appearance, manners, and words, and said to myself, 'God has pity on me.' But then I recollected my many crimes, and I asked myself, 'How can God forgive me?' At that moment the girl, having filled her vase at the fountain, passed by me again, and again the words, 'May God protect you!' fell upon my ear. For many successive evenings I went to the same spot, and every time the girl came and saluted me with the same kind but ominous words. They made a deep impression upon me. I could have lived without food for days, but not without meeting her. Her name was Anna Riparella; she was the daughter of a shepherd from Vittana. On a certain evening I said to her, 'Annetta, be pleased to come and sit down near me.' She looked me full in the face, directed my eyes towards the image of the Madonna, and

sat down. I understood her, rose up, and, taking her by the hand, I led her towards the blessed Virgin, and then addressed her thus : 'Annetta, we have been going on for some time without knowing whither. Listen to me. Strangers dwell in the house of my fathers. The fields that ought to be mine are sown and reaped by others. I can offer you nothing. On the contrary, my life is forfeited. I will not deceive you. All the waters of yonder fountain could not wash my hands clean. You need not look at them : the spots are visible only to my Creator. If you unite your fate to mine you must expect days of danger, nights of horror, and a life of shame. The heritage I could leave to my children would be stained with blood—to your widowhood the name of an executed culprit. If I listen to my heart I desire ardently to become your husband, but if to my reason I should prefer being rejected ; therefore I will not appeal to you, nor will I dissuade you.'

" 'Marzio,' replied Annetta, 'I know you, and I am aware of your misdeeds ; but I prefer sorrow with you to joys with others. What care I about your life being forfeited ? If justice pursues you we will conceal ourselves together ; if it finds us we will defend ourselves together ; and if it takes us we will die together. Let that pass ; all I ask is that you will abandon your present mode of life. A tear of repentance will effect more than all the waters of yonder fountain.'

" Thus spoke Annetta, the simple village girl, whose only

education was religion. I felt as if a heavy load had been removed from off my heart. I was an altered being, and replied, 'I make a vow to leave my companions as soon as possible. Were I to leave them abruptly they would suspect treason, and their suspicions are closely followed by death. Meanwhile, I swear to abstain from all evil deeds, and I swear, also, to take you for my lawful wife.' So saying, I took from my finger a ring that had belonged to my mother. I held it up to the Madonna to consecrate it, and then placing it on her finger, I said, 'Annetta, you are now my wife.'

"'I have no ring,' she replied; 'but this lock of my hair shall be a solemn pledge that I will become your wife.'

"A few days after this occurrence we received information that a strong body of police was put in motion for our capture. Sciarra, although only a captain of banditti, had all the qualities of a good general. He gave his orders and instructions, disposing his men in such a manner that none of those sent against us returned to Rome to give an account of their defeat. On my return from this expedition I found my Annetta under our trysting tree; but alas! she had been murdered, her hands gashed with wounds, and her face swollen with blows: a knife was planted in her breast. She was beautiful even in death. I saw her decently buried, and then fell senseless on her grave. On regaining my consciousness I walked away without listening to the priest who tried to console me. Upon inquiry I found out that Count

Cenci, whose path could always be tracked in blood, had been staying at Rocca Petrella. An inward voice told me that he had been the assassin. After many fruitless researches I found out, through a shepherd boy, that my Annetta went every evening to that place, where she was in the habit of praying for several hours. On a certain evening the boy saw a man in the dress of a nobleman stop his horse and speak to her, but she made a curtsy and walked away. On the following evening he saw two bravi rush out from the wood, seize the girl, and drag her off. The lad had driven his sheep away from that spot, because he was afraid; but he had told me all he knew, because I had paid him well. He described the dresses and features minutely, so I kept a good look-out at the Rocca, concealing myself in the daytime, and prowling about by night like a fox. One day I saw a man, whom I recognised by the boy's description. I pounced upon him like a tiger, and almost strangled him before he knew what I was about. However, I offered to spare his life, provided he told me how the death of the girl was compassed. Fear made him confess that his master, the Count Francesco Cenci, had taken a liking to her, but that she had repulsed his advances with scorn, and when he found that no offers and no threats could make her yield, he gave him and another man orders to seize and carry her to the castle. There the Count attempted to effect his object by violence, but that the stalwart peasant girl made such good use of her hands,

that she and her assailant fell down together, rolling over and over, and biting and kicking desperately. The girl being the more agile of the two, got the best of the struggle, extricated herself, and, when on her legs again, gave the Count a violent kick in the face, exclaiming, 'Take that, you execrable ravisher! Had I my stiletto I would have slit your throat, but a kick is better fitted for you. When my husband comes back I will not rest until he has made me a present of your ears.' The Count rose up in his turn without uttering a word; but before she could avoid him his knife had pierced her heart, and she had sunk senseless to the ground. When twilight had thrown a shade over the forest he ordered us to carry the corpse to the oak. The Count followed with a lantern, gave us directions to deposit it under the very image of the Madonna, where we had seized her on the previous day, and then he addressed her thus: 'Now, when your husband returns you will tell no tales.' After having extorted this avowal I gave the wretch a kick, and told him to go and inform his master that the husband of Anna Riparella had returned, and that he intended paying him a visit that very night as in duty bound. I kept my promise. Having induced several of my most resolute companions to join me, we broke into the castle; but the Count had already left for Rome, not finding himself sufficiently protected. We pillaged and burnt the house, but my main object was frustrated, namely, to revenge her, and then destroy myself. I stated my case to our captain, who bade me persevere.

He even offered me his services, and gave me leave to retire from his band. How I worked myself into your father's service is needless to relate. No pilgrim ever paced the holy shrine of Loretto more devoutly than did I the floor of his palace, where I plotted to surround him with sorrow, desolation, and solitude. I wished to deprive him of every affection, and make an orphan of his heart, as he had made of mine. Imagine my surprise, Lady Beatrice, when I discovered that the destruction of his family would only tend to make him happy. His unnatural hatred conquered mine. I felt pity for you all, especially for you, my lady, because I felt a yearning for one that reminded me of my poor Annetta, whom I adored, as I"

Marzio was going to kneel down before her, but Beatrice quickly prevented him, and said, "No, Marzio; dust must not prostrate itself before dust—we are but dust all of us. But, Marzio, remember what you say to me and how you say it." There was such dignified mildness in her words that Marzio could scarcely feel mortified.

"Noble lady! why will you not allow me to kneel before you? Sacred things we adore on our knees, and you are consecrated by misfortune. There is no human being who resembles so much the *Madonna del dolore* as yourself. Still fear not, my lady; you will not hear a single word from me that would give you offence. I hold Monsignor Guerra in high estimation, since that noble youth has placed his affections on so worthy an object as yourself. Imprudent children! how often would not that bad old

man have detected and killed you both but for me ! Unfortunately I could not give you timely warning in the garden ; but it was I who compelled Guido to effect his escape, after having assured him that his resistance would only bring destruction upon you, and that I would watch over you. I would fain keep my promise, but I cannot break my vow ; and you will not allow me to execute my vengeance here, although it would save you. Perhaps suspicions would fall upon you all were I to slay him in his palace, so it were better that I should quit it. I am a wretched man ; I feel nothing but profound respect and tender benevolence for you, so I presume to beg of you to remember and to forgive me."

"I cannot but remember," said Beatrice, solemnly, "that you seek to slay my father ; and I cannot forget that, although you once protected, you have now abandoned me. Marzio, let my father live on—his years will not be many—do not send him thus before his Creator—wait till he is summoned."

"I cannot alter my resolution—impossible ; I have made a vow—the manes of my murdered wife must be appeased, and you yourself must be saved. God's justice is in the execution of my just and firm resolve."

"Marzio, God's finger does not inscribe His judgment in blood."

"You forget, my lady, that God's vicar in Rome was Sixtus V., and that the Pope who now reigns does inscribe his judgments in letters of blood."

"I know nothing of priests," remonstrated Beatrice ;
"I only know that our Lord reprobated the law which claims '*an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.*' He bids us love our enemies. Marzio, it is for the Almighty, not for us, to sit in judgment and pass sentence on His creatures. That which is justice in Him is crime in us."

"How can I let him live?" exclaimed Marzio, striking his forehead as though some forgotten subject had suddenly rushed upon his memory. "Had I remained but a few minutes longer listening to your pious words another of his victims would have died of hunger ; but to hear you reason would make one linger even at the gates of paradise itself. Poor Olympio ! while I am arguing here you are counting the minutes with your famished ravings." And, hastily snatching up the lantern and the basket, he hurried towards the other end of the cavern, followed by Beatrice, who, though scarcely able to walk, was eager to unravel the horrid mystery.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEMORIAL.

“ Per il che non potendo durare in così infelice vita prese la Strada della Sorella Olimpia, e mandò al Papa un buon et ben composto memoriale, ma, o che quello fossedato, o no, la sua ragionevole Inchiesta non ebbe effetto non si è trovato in Segreteria dei memoriali quando ne faceva bisogno mentr'era in Prigione.”

MANOSCRITTO DEL TEMPO.

ON reaching the door of Olympio's cell Marzio, followee by Beatrice, called him several times by his name without receiving any reply. At length a feeble voice faltered, “Avaunt! depart from me! Lead me not into temptation, and deliver me from evil. I will settle my affairs with Providence as well as I can. Let me die in peace.”

Marzio unlocked the door, and found his quondam companion in a sadly emaciated state, unable even to bear the light of the lantern. He raised him up, and poured down his throat a few drops of the cordial which he had brought with him. Olympio recovered by degrees, and, seeing the basket of provisions on the damp ground, fell upon them like a famished wolf. He was gently admonished by Marzio to be more moderate, as a too hasty and abundant meal would prove fatal to him; but, regardless of his friend's

salutary advice, Olympio gorged himself well-nigh to bursting, and then exclaimed, "Oh, the infamous traitor! The atrocious old villain to starve me thus! He wished to silence me; I can see through it all now. I have executed so many of his orders lately—the poor carpenter burnt alive, the conflagration, and Donna Luisa and the curate, and the Falconieri job—all these villanies were directed by him. I was but an instrument in his hands—his blood-stained hands. I was driven by harsh necessity. The beasts find their pasture prepared for them by Providence, but men commit crimes for bread. Presently I am wounded by the blood-hounds of the police—take refuge at my employer's house. He receives me graciously, and says, 'This man wishes to be concealed. I will place him three yards under ground. In faith, an excellent contrivance, most noble Count. Marzio, is not Don Francesco a kind man? Ay, and a prudent man to boot, for you see he reasoned thus: 'Justice is on the look-out for my confederate; they will put him to the question, and the rack might draw from him some revelations which might compromise me. Once dead no torture can make him peach.'"

"You must be calm," said Marzio; "you must eat but little at a time. Rest yourself until your strength returns. I must leave you now for a short space.

"No, Marzio, never. I will not stop here. I will and must have fresh air. I feel as though the dome of St. Peter's were lying on my chest. I must revenge myself, and die in the open air like a hero or a bandit. But who

is that girl there staring at me like a wild cat? Is she not his daughter?"

"It is the Lady Beatrice, his daughter," replied Marzio. "She was imprisoned like yourself by that monster, and therefore little likely to injure you."

Beatrice walked towards him and said, "Providence has preserved you by a miracle. Change your mode of life; convert your weapons into a spade, and the mercy of God may yet reach you."

Olympio was accustomed to heed the advice of others about as much as a tower bends to a gust of wind. Still he felt impressed, without clearly comprehending the solemn words addressed to him.

They went forth from the cavern, and Beatrice, on returning to her cell, entreated Marzio to bring writing materials in order to prepare a memorial to the Pope, and also a dagger to serve as a last desperate resource in extremity. Marzio promised faithfully to execute her commissions, and returned to his master's apartment, where he found two monks standing by the side of the Count's bed. Both had their faces concealed by their cowls.

The Count ordered Marzio to lay down the keys and leave the room, and then addressing himself to the pretended monks, he said with a smile, "Did you mark him well, my reverend fathers? He is to start to-morrow for Rocca Petrella. You will waylay him on the road, and a ball or two through his body will settle the business satis-

factorily. Meanwhile you can say a few masses for his soul : here is the money for them."

"It is well, Eccellenza," replied one of the monks as they were retiring. "We know him well ; besides, we shall recognise him by his red cloak."

As Marzio conducted the holy men through the ante-room he saw a dagger fall from under the cloak of one of them. He picked it up, handed it to him, and observed, "Look, reverend father, you have dropped one of your chaplets."

"My son, the Lord allows us to protect our lives from the aggression of the wicked ; even saints have done so."

"Assuredly," replied Marzio, "for martyrdom is not absolutely necessary to canonisation. However, I must beg that your reverence will consent to listen to my confession of a sin which weighs somewhat heavily on my conscience."

"What ! now and here ?" asked the monk.

"Every moment and every place is meet for such a purpose when the soul of a fellow Christian is to be saved. Did our Lord say to those who came to Him, *Return to-morrow* ? Good father, do not leave me without your religious consolation. A few minutes will suffice : please to follow me into this little room."

Suiting the action to the words, he laid hold of his arm and dragged him after him. The monk requested his companion to wait, and retired with Marzio, who immediately pulled back the cowl of his soi-disant father

confessor, and exclaimed, with a laugh, "Ho, ho! Grimo!"

"Marzio! Who would ever have thought of seeing you dressed in the livery of a lackey?"

"Or," replied Marzio, "seeing you dressed as a monk?"

"But what are your projects?" inquired Grimo.

"I'll tell you, but time is precious. I have become Count Cenci's valet that I may kill him, for he has murdered my wife."

"Halt a moment," said Grimo, confidentially, in his turn; "I have been instructed by the Count to kill a certain Marzio to-morrow: is he a relative of yours?"

"I suspected something of that sort, old Grimo, so I was determined to have a word with you on the subject. Do you intend to execute the commission?"

"I have received the money, friend Marzio, and you know the rules of our trade."

"That being the case, of course you will consider it very natural that I should prevent it by killing you first."

"Not at all, Marzio; there is a way to arrange such trifles amongst old companions. Dog must not eat dog. You know that in Sciarra's troop we have always practised the precepts of rigid integrity. When we have received money to kill a man we have never broken our word, otherwise our honourable profession would have lost its credit and customers. I have pledged my faith to wait for a man to-morrow on the road to Rocca Petrella, and to kill him: if

that man comes not I have done my duty, and can go back to the forest with a clear conscience."

"Grimo, you are a great philosopher; but who is your companion?"

"He is the son of Trofimo, the miller. A young man from Rieti took a fancy to his mistress, who was faithless to him, so he killed them both. It was a silly trick. He has been with us ever since, and a promising youth he is."

"An idea strikes me, friar Grimo. Tell me before we part, where can I find you and that youngster, because I may shortly want your good offices?"

"At the inn called L'Acqua Ferrata there is a lad who is deaf and dumb; but if you should happen to say to him, '*The road is lonely on the mountain,*' he may, perchance, understand you; nay, he may even answer you; and now *ego te absolvo.*"

When Marzio returned to the Count's room his worthy master bade him come to his bedside, and said, "Marzio, I can no longer deceive myself. Age and infirmities are creeping over me; it is, therefore, prudent to leave the theatre before the lights are extinguished. I shall retire to Rocca Petrella. You must set out to-morrow with letters to the custode to announce my arrival."

Marzio retired, and then assisted his friend Olympio over the garden wall. The latter wanted to set fire to the house, or to rush in and strangle the Count; but Marzio prevailed upon him to postpone his revenge for a few days,

in order to render it more complete. He then repaired to the cavern in which poor Beatrice was immured, urged her to fly also, but found her firm in the resolution to bear everything that Providence might inflict. She gave him the memorial, begging of him to deliver it to her Guido, and conjured him once more to abandon the sinful intent of murdering her father. Marzio replied not ; he merely muttered the word *fatality*, and rushed from her presence.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TIBER.

"Acque del Tibro, a voi solo è rimasta
La grandezza di Roma."

ANFOSSI, *Beatrice Cenci*.

THE waters of the Tiber flow on now, as they flowed when the seven hills of Rome were crowned with all their towers. They have flowed past kingdoms, republics, empires, and peoples, besides a whole generation of deities.

The dust of heroes, bandits, popes, and heretics, is mingled on her banks. The whirlpool of her waters rolls alike over the statues of Jupiter, of Mercury, St. Peter, and St. Paul. All around is ruin and decay, but old Tiber remains unchanged as the sun of Italy that still gilds the Coliseum. If it be true that a laurel grew spontaneously on the altar of Augustus, the most discreet of tyrants, why may not laurels grow again on thy banks, Oh Tiber, once their chosen seat? Too long hast thou been nurtured with our tears. Perhaps the sacred tree will again flourish amongst us, but its leaves shall never again be wreathed around the sword of a conqueror, who would trample down the liberties of mankind. O Lord! grant us another Camillus or

Scipio. Look down in mercy on our unparalleled degradation. Send forth some noble spirit amongst us—a spirit who deems the exaltation of his fellow beings his glorious mission upon earth. Heaven will sanctify that war only in which the rising generation of patriots will have to fight for liberty. Our poets will hymn their praises. As for us poor down-trodden soldiers of that sacred cause, worn out with sorrow and sufferings, what can we offer but our prayers and our blessings? Despise them not, Oh ye coming generations! Our blessings will bring good fortune to all who receive them with devotion.

Oh, Tiber! thou hast seen a nation reared by a she-wolf take its proud stand on the Capitol, and look down upon the world, exclaiming, "*It is mine.*"

The imperial bauble was no vain allegory. The Roman eagle clenched his talons into the world's bleeding flanks. Alas! how bitterly have we expiated its avidity! The sole glory that we have reaped consists in our having emerged from the womb of the catacombs, to propagate over the world a religion of mercy, liberty, and civilisation—a holy conquest, for it diffused freedom and good-will towards men. But alas! to what bad uses has it not since been perverted! How many mysteries and how many crimes does the Tiber conceal within its bed! Were the patricians less treacherous as rebels against Agis and Cleomenes, than infamous as tyrants against Caius and Tiberius Gracchus? What boots it whether they conquered by violence or by fraud? They compounded an infamous

calumny, and then dignified it with the name of history.

Tell me, O sacred Tiber, before I leave thee, who ever wandered about thy banks in search of the bones of Gracchus? The people for whom he died? Alas, no! Cornelia alone came in solitary sorrow to search for the corpse of her beloved son.

Ungrateful people! Where were you when the desolate mother thus wandered forth on her pious pilgrimage? Carousing in the taverns of the vile Suburra, quaffing your amphoræ of Falernian.

But it is time to proceed with our narrative. Giacomo Cenci did not return to his home for several days. The vindictive feelings engendered by the insidious letter and adroit insinuations of old Cenci, though still rankling in Luisa's bosom, had lost most of their venom. She reasoned that either her husband had lost all affection for herself and her children, or that something dreadful must have happened to him; in either case she felt miserable. Offended pride and conjugal attachment contended for the mastery of her excited imagination. Regardless even of the caresses of her children, she looked upon Angiolina as the authoress of all her sorrows; but her generous nature prevented her from withholding her compassionate attentions to the poor invalid.

On a certain evening, while ruminating on her sad fate, the door was suddenly opened, and Giacomo presented himself. He spoke not, but sat down near the table, and covered his face with his hands.

He looked very pale, his hair was dishevelled, and his dress and hat were soiled with mud.

Luisa, overcome by alarm and compassion, presented the baby to him as an olive branch, but Giacomo heeded not her advances of peace. Suddenly he started up and exclaimed, "Why did I come here to revive the affections of my heart? I must destroy both heart and affections, then all will be over." So saying, he was about to depart again, when Luisa asked him pathetically, "Will a father abandon his children?"

"Who are my children? Which of them will bear witness that he is of my flesh and blood? How can I trust the tongue of that deceitful woman whose words are nets spread for my destruction? I can well understand," he added, with a bitter smile, "that a man like me, who does not know how to provide for his own family, over whose brow hovers the curse of Providence, a useless and fated being, can inspire nothing but contempt; but that you should boast of your guilt, and convert your misdeeds into stones to hurl at my innocent heart, is beyond my comprehension."

Luisa looked at him in utter astonishment, but Giacomo went on: "Was it not enough to have vilified me, and to have covered me with shame, but must you also overwhelm me with a storm of perfidious accusations, and throw dust in my eyes to blind me to your own misconduct?"

"Giacomo!"

"Oh! rest assured, Luisa, I did not come home again to upbraid, but only to declare to you that you have distracted but not deceived me, and that all is over between us."

"Giacomo, I conjure you, do not leave me thus. It is your bounden duty to explain these words full of horrible mystery."

"Oh! you wish to have a comment to the text, madam? You shall have it. Who has provided you so suddenly with all these comforts? I left poverty in my house, and find wealth in its place; but I left something here besides—my honour—and that is gone. Who gave you the money, madam? Where does your generous protector conceal himself?"

"Giacomo, consider that you outrage a mother in the presence of her children. A relative of yours has assisted me. I cannot divulge his name, because I am bound to secrecy. I am a woman who would rather see her children starve than feed them with the price of her shame. These vile suspicions cannot affect me, as I am as pure as your own mother who is in paradise."

"How can you suppose, madam, that I can put faith in your assertions when you disregarded my tears, and even my oath? What could you allege against the fidelity of your husband? The perfidious insinuations of an anonymous calumniator—nothing more. Secret information was given to me also. I would not listen to it; but this sudden transformation from penury to wealth speaks for itself."

"Giacomo, your suspicions are infamous."

"I could revenge myself," he proceeded; "but would vengeance restore my lost happiness? Because I am wretched am I to make you wretched also? No, madam, I will not revenge myself; on the contrary, I will rid you of my presence; you will then have no check or impediment. I will not ask you to remember me—it matters little. I once did love these innocent creatures; in fact, I looked on them as a portion of myself, and to tear them from my affections now is hard indeed. I commend them to your care, madam; you are, at all events, their mother."

Luisa, observing his state of excitement, thus called out to her children: "Oh, my darlings! quick, embrace him—make him feel that he is your father."

Giacomo kissed them tenderly, bade them farewell for ever, and rushed away. Luisa pursued him, entreating him frantically to return, but in vain; despair added wings to his flight. His unhappy wife, hastily snatching up her cloak, hurried after him. After traversing several streets she found herself in the neighbourhood of the palace of Monsignor Guido Guerra. Remembering that young nobleman's attachment to the Cenci family, she entered the house, following the lackey, to whom she would not even grant time to announce her name. She found Monsignor Guido in company with some persons whom she imagined she had seen before; but, addressing herself to him alone, she exclaimed,—

"Oh, Monsignore! for mercy's sake despatch some of your people in search of my husband. He has left his home in a state bordering on frenzy, and with some dreadful resolve. I fear he has made for the Tiber."

"Good God!" exclaimed Guerra. "Come, Marzio, let us not lose a moment; do you take the left, and I will look out on the right bank, whilst Olympio will accompany Donna Luisa."

They started off immediately. On their way Donna Luisa said to Olympio, "Your face is not unknown to me, but my head is so distracted that my memory fails me. Oh! I remember now. You were present at the conflagration of the poor carpenter's house, and it was you who endeavoured to aid me in assisting the poor creatures."

"All the merit of that heroic act is due to you, most noble lady, and none to me; but will you pardon my indiscretion if I ask you why you were disguised in male attire on that fatal night?"

"Know that the woman whose life I saved had pierced my heart, and brought sorrow on my family; she had torn asunder the hands that were united by Providence; in short, she had stolen away my husband's affections from me. On that dismal night I was wandering about, brooding on revenge, when on a sudden I heard shrieks, and saw the desolate woman with her child at the window. In an instant I forgot the hated rival, I only saw in her the distracted mother."

Olympio's conscience smote him. After a brief pause he said, "If repentance could repair the injuries I have inflicted I would unburden my heart to you, for I could not hope to find a better mediator than yourself between me and my Creator; but every page of my calendar is so blotted with crimes, that the recording angel would find no place for the word *mercy*. Still I will reveal to you the mystery which enshrouds that fearful occurrence; for, although my confession cannot benefit me, it may be of some importance to you. Do you know who set fire to that house? It was I. Do you know who delivered those anonymous letters which have driven your husband to this extremity? It was I. And do you know at whose instigation? It was Count Francesco Cenci, your father-in-law, who intrusted me with his diabolical mission, rubbing his hands and muttering to himself, '*I will sow hatred, and they shall reap desolation.*'"

Donna Luisa, horrified at finding herself in contact with such a miscreant, bounded from him like a deer, and rushed to her home, eager to fathom this terrible mystery. She flew to Angiolina's bedside and cried, "Woman! for the love you bear to your God, tell me the truth: do you know Count Cenci?"

Angiolina meekly replied, "I know an old baron of that name who had our house rebuilt, and who once offered me money, which I refused to take at first, but my husband desired me to accept it. In spite of his grey hair and kind words, there was something sinister in his

BRATICE GEA

reluctant to ~~swear~~ ~~swear~~ ~~it~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~cross~~

about him, but about his son.

that Don Francesco

of them, nor did I

with so much ingenuity

the sceptic would have

You do not know his name

swear it by the

devotion, and said,

of the cross is the crucifix, and holy

so I will not swear by them. But you

like myself, and you will believe me when I

on the bosom of my sleeping child, and

May this blessed little heart cease to beat if I

swear the truth!"

he bent over Angiolina, passionately embracing her.

"Oh! I believe you now, I believe you now;"

which she darted off again in search of her

hand

We have stated that Giacomo had left his house as if

driven by the furies; but his speed soon abated, because

his determination to destroy himself was no sudden im-

mediate result of mature deliberation.

Reaching the Tiber he leant on the parapet of the

bridge of St. Angelo for some time, immersed in deep meditation ; and just as he was going to plunge into the yellow waters rushing beneath he was pulled back by two strong arms, and heard a well-known voice addressing him :—

“ Giacomo, are you mad ? ”

He turned mournfully round, and recognised his friend Guido Guerra, who expostulated, “ Have you not a wife and children ? ”

He made no reply, and allowed himself to be led away like a man who has no longer a will or a purpose of his own. On reaching his house he continued silent, gazing mechanically and suspiciously around him. Luisa, who by this time had returned home, rushed towards her husband, threw herself at his feet, and said, “ Giacomo, we have wronged each other. My excuse must be, that not even Eve could guard herself against the perfidious tongue of the serpent, though she came out of the very hands of the Creator, and must therefore be considered more perfect than other women. I have at last discovered Count Francesco Cenci’s execrable machinations, and my oath is no longer binding. Despair drove me to his house ; his words and acts were those of a tender parent, the hypocrite ! He poisoned my mind with insinuations of your amours, and of the money you squandered on your concubine, whilst you allowed your own family to starve, and insisted upon my accepting three hundred ducats on condition of not revealing to you whence they came. He

"Heaven forbid, Luisa; but still, believe me, it would have been better that I had perished in the Tiber, and of this you will have ample proof."

She attributed his emotion to his recent troubles, and forbore farther expostulations, hoping that her fostering care and the caresses of her children would restore peace to his shaken spirits.

On that very night Marzio and Olympio left Rome, well provided with money and fire-arms, although little apprehensive of danger.

When Don Francesco was sufficiently recovered from the pain in his foot he awakened his family one morning at break of day, and ordered them to come down to the courtyard of the palace. On descending Beatrice found it occupied by saddle-horses and men-at-arms.

She did not dare to make any inquiries respecting their destination. The Count had provided for everything with his usual forethought.

There was a good store of linen in the carriage, also plate and provisions, and orders had been given to take care of a particular bottle of Cyprus, which was labelled with the date of 1550. As Beatrice was about to step into the carriage she turned towards her father and said, "Father, I must speak to you."

"Silence—get in!" was his harsh reply. But Beatrice clasped her hands imploringly, and again exclaimed, "Listen to me, father, for the love of God; it is a matter of life and death to you."

The Count pushed her in, fastened the door, and pulled down the blinds, disdaining her entreaties as a stratagem to escape from his fangs. He mounted his horse and gave orders to start. The whole company bore the aspect rather of a funeral procession than a travelling cavalcade. They left Rome by the gate of St. Lorenzo, and, following the Via Tiburtina, reached Tivoli.

No poet ever traversed the Campagna of Rome without recording the impressions produced on his mind by scenes so pregnant with past glories and present desolation.

No painter ever lingered there without being inspired by the very air of that glorious sepulchre, on which the sun rises and sets in unparalleled magnificence. The hearts of its inhabitants have ceased to beat for nearly twenty centuries. Why should we, then, open the gates of the Temple of Janus? Can we fill the Via Sacra with chariots, horses, and cavaliers, whose glittering armour dazzled the eye like the rays of the sun? Why should we perfume it with the smoke rising from the golden censers of the *Flamens*? Why resuscitate a spectacle of barbarian kings in chains, and triumphal armies shouting hymns of victory? Is it not enough for us to hear the drone of psalms chanted behind the solitary bier of some wretched peasant, the victim of the pestiferous malaria? Why open the tombs of the *Horatii*, the *Plautii*, the *Scipios*, or those of *Cestius* and *Metella*? Can the charm of poetry or any incantation of ours call forth words from the frozen lips of the dead? But, could all this be done, what advantage

would Italy reap therefrom? Will the great deeds of the ancients inspire the living with energy? Alas! God has abandoned us, because our ignominy exceeds even His mercy. Our bygone glories should be transformed into scourges to chastise our modern corruption. We are all guilty. Clothed in sackcloth and ashes, the prophet lamented over the desolation of Jerusalem. By the waters of Babylon the virgins of Sion hung their harps on the willows, and wept over the bitter slavery of Israel—less miserable than we, since they were not hindered from lamenting aloud, nor were the Hebrews prevented from swelling the sad chorus. But this consolation is denied to us; we may not even whisper, lest our murmurs might displease the stranger, who would crush us like worms. We must groan in silence, lest brother should denounce brother, and the judge (a brother also) should doom his brethren to prison or the scaffold to please the stranger, who rewards him with the salary of his shame and the title obtained by his infamy.

Farewell, ye falling waters of Tivoli! In vain do your genii seek to dazzle us with your rainbow; you shall not be honoured by our minstrelsy. Farewell, pale waters of the Anio, which have witnessed the mysterious rites of the aborigines! Flow on in peace over yonder dead Campagna. We shall not ask ye whether the bygone races of the Enotoii, the Ausonii, or the Itali were more wretched than ourselves in this land, where the vine grows on rocks scorched by volcanoes, where intelligence

vegetates on the brambles of superstition, and where virtue cowers under the stroke of the axe. Alas, alas ! the fate of Prometheus is no fable in Italy, but a sad reality.

Here is the Campus Martius, the legacy of Tarquinius the Proud to the people. Will the people ever understand that the gifts of tyrants turn to poison ?

Here is the Via Appia crossing the Pontine marshes, and leading to Brundisium, another memento of the greatness of our forefathers. Next we behold the more modern ruins of Anagni, where the proud conceit of popery was debased in the person of Boniface VIII., when he was struck in the face by Sciarra Colonna. As the earth did not immediately open at such a sacrilege, the world began to doubt the pontifical divinity, a dogma that the scarlet lady of Babylon has ever sought to enforce on pain of eternal perdition.

There lies Ferentino, where history relates that Manfred, in his haste to reign, suffocated his father. How dazzlingly dangerous must be the glitter of a crown, when so worthy a prince did not scruple to gain his sceptre at the tremendous price of a parricide !

Farther away we behold St. Germano, where the Puglians descried the standard of that same Manfred, and went over to the Duke d'Anjou, exemplifying thereby the common error of slaves, who fancy themselves free when they have only changed masters, while in reality they only reap the well-merited contempt of their old and new rulers.

Turning towards the Mediterranean we observe a small castle, well known by the cruelty which was perpetrated within its walls on young Hohenstauffen, the unhappy Corradin—a flower cut off in the morning of life.

A little beyond emerges Minturna. It was there that Marius concealed himself, and scared away by the terror of his looks the savage Cimbrian who had come to put him to death.

But let us turn towards the Adriatic, since both seas are discernible from those heights. Yonder are the towers of Ancona, recalling to our memory the desperate defence made by its inhabitants of old. Cesena makes us reflect on the dreadful massacre commanded by Cardinal Ginevra, who rebuked the Condottiere Acuto for expressing his abhorrence at the general butchery, exclaiming, "Blood! I must have blood! Let them all die!" vindicating thus his claim to wear the purple.

There is Sinigaglia, notorious for the massacre of the Romagnese barons by Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentino, that atrocious bastard of Pope Alexander VI.

Wherever we look we hear the seas of Italy ever murmuring with their waves, "Treachery, treachery!"

If we turn our eyes eastward we see the waters of the Lake Fucino, now still as those of the Dead Sea.

Claudius, whose savage nature was not satiated with the thousands slain in the circus, wished to please his eye with a naval combat on those waters.

He procured three thousand men, or rather wild beasts

in human form, who consented to massacre each other for the imperial gratification. Thus ancient Rome could find more slaves willing to die for the recreation of a tyrant than modern Rome can find citizens who are ready to die for liberty.

Above this universal sea of ruins emerges the cupola of St. Peter, which seems to float like Noah's ark amidst the deluge.

We left our travellers on the road to Tivoli, from whence they entered on the Via Valleria and reached Vicovano, where they were obliged to stop on account of the state of the road, rendered impassable by protracted rains. They departed again at vespers, and reached the inn of the Acqua Ferrata, at which point it became necessary to abandon the carriage and ascend the mountain on mules. The first thing the Count inquired of the landlord was whether anybody had come for him from Rocca Petrella.

"Eccellenza," replied the man, "I have not seen or heard of anybody."

"Did not a servant of mine of the name of Marzio stop here?"

Don Francesco had put the second question purposely to find out whether Marzio had been killed or not, and also to dissemble all knowledge of the homicide; but, as the innkeeper again replied in the negative, he counterfeited much indignation at the negligence of servants in general for not executing their masters' orders, and then requested

him to provide mules immediately. The host was seen gesticulating to a deaf and dumb boy, who seemed to comprehend, as he shook his head and made for the mountain with all speed to procure the required aid. Let the boy run; he knows the road, and will not lose his way.

CHAPTER XIX.

MOUNT ELIA.

"Tra male gatti è capitato il Sorcio."

DANTE.

IN a copse of lonely oaks growing on a steep declivity of Mount Elia a large fire was burning, around which several persons were stretched in different attitudes. On the summit of that mountain the night air of September is chilling, although the heat may be suffocating in the valley below.

"Comrades," said one of the men, "mayhap Marzio has become a convert."

"What he intends doing," said another, "I am at a loss to tell; but as far as I am concerned I will wait till to-morrow, and if he does not make his appearance then, by St. Nicolas! I shall desert with arms and baggage in spite of the agreement. What! to send us up here without any wine? Look at the bottles—they are all empty; and you know that I had rather see a sbirro than an empty bottle."

"You are right, Grimo; he has not even provided us with a pack of cards. Why these are cruelties to make a

Nero faint. I am almost tempted to recite a prayer. What do you say, Orazio?"

"As good as anything else to pass one's time. But you are all in the wrong to complain, because to-morrow our time will be up, and if nothing happens in the interval we shall have earned all this money without any danger or remorse for the first time in our lives."

Orazio, the last speaker, was a bandit of grave aspect, tall, and rather advanced in life. He was regarded by his comrades as the poet, the physician, and the legislator of the band. When interrogated he would give advice—he would even occasionally sing songs composed by himself, and tell strange stories of distant countries; but in his ordinary mood he was taciturn, given to meditation, fantastic, and a lover of the marvellous.

While the banditti were still conversing a clear and melodious voice broke the silence of the night.

"Stir not," whispered Orazio to his companions, who were rushing to their weapons. "'Tis only our little deaf and dumb friend from the Acqua Ferrata. All he possesses in the wide world is a fine voice and poverty; you cannot rob him of the first, and would not of the second."

When the boy, who looked cunning beyond his age, approached the group, he inquired for Marzio.

"Perhaps you can tell us something about him, my young imp. This is the last night that we are bound to wait for him; but at any rate you can stay with us and treat us to a song."

"The song I commenced just now? It was composed by some stupid mountaineer hereabouts."

Orazio looked vexed and said, "It has been composed hereabouts, doubtless, you ugly little monkey, but by no dolt, for I am the author."

"I beg your pardon, Orazio; I was not aware . . ."

"Aware or not, the singer must not depreciate the composer, and my poetry is as good as your voice. How could you sing it, you dog, without my rhymes?"

To conciliate the offended poet the lad began to sing it so melodiously that even Orazio looked satisfied.

"Here is a scudo for you," broke in Marzio, coming out suddenly from behind a tree in company with Olympio. "You are the nightingale of the bandits."

The boy, much flattered by the compliment, refused the coin, and said, "Marzio, I do not sing for money; my voice was given to me without paying for it, so I give it gratis. My master, of the Acqua Ferrata, sent me to inform you that the Count has arrived."

"Has he?"

"I saw him myself. He has his wife, children, and an escort with him, and requires some mules from the charcoal-burners, because he wishes to proceed this very night."

"What escort?"

"Twelve men—not from these parts, but from Tuscany."

The mules were provided by Marzio's order, and Orazio, blacking his hands and face, conducted them to the Acqua

Ferrata. Immediately on their arrival the Count gave orders to depart.

Beatrice, after in vain endeavouring to speak to her father, made another effort before mounting her mule, threw herself at his feet, and entreated him not to proceed, as he would be waylaid and murdered by Marzio.

The brutal parent repulsed her with violence, and ordered a servant to watch and prevent her from leaving the cavalcade.

The night waxed darker as they ascended Mount Elia, and the wind moaned drearily amongst the trees. After passing Rio Freddo they reached Rocca Carenzia, from whence they re-ascended through a path called Monte di Bove. At two in the morning they crossed Rocca di Carro in the Via Valeria, skirting the stupendous cliffs of Tagliacozzo. Had it been daylight or full moon they might have distinguished Rocca Petrella from that spot. Their road now led them across a valley intercepted and broken by brushwood and stone walls. The moon had taken refuge in a dark cloud, and seemed to travel more slowly than before. Suddenly lights flashed around them, and a number of men levelled their rifles at the cavalcade, shouting, "Halt, all of you!"

Escape was impossible, and resistance would have been fatal. The corporal of the escort asked the Count for his orders in this emergency, observing that if resistance were offered their lives would be sacrificed.

"Speak to them, then," said Cenci; "see what diplomacy will effect, and try to capitulate."

Ere he had finished his sentence a stentorian voice shouted, "The escort must deposit their weapons and turn back. We give the order but once; the second hint we give with our blunderbusses. The family must remain, as we have some private accounts to settle."

The escort did not wait for any second intimation, but, piling up their arms, left without another word. The same stentorian voice commanded Count Cenci to move to the rear of the cavalcade. He obeyed readily enough, but was overheard muttering,—

"Whenever I attempt to be economical everything goes wrong. Had I taken fifty men with me instead of twelve I should have saved a fortune, since they will not be satisfied with all my luggage and plate, but a heavy ransom will, of course, be extorted from me."

By this time he was surrounded and disarmed by four fellows, to whom he said, "Take heed! do not bind me: I should never forgive so great an outrage."

"The family may proceed," said the captain of the band, "but the Count remains with us."

Beatrice recognised the voice of Marzio, and knew at once that it was not a question of ransom or booty, but that some greater crime was contemplated. Accordingly she turned with a determined air towards the robbers, and addressed them thus: "My friends, I shall not tell you to take all we have with us, because that is yours already;

but I would speak to you of ransom. Ask, and we are ready to pay it, only ask enough to make you all rich for the remainder of your days; fix any sum that you please within the bounds of reason, for we are richer than you imagine."

"Beatrice, are you mad?" whispered the Count.

"Father, you little know what danger hangs over you. I must speak, for silence were fatal. We will pay you a fortune, good people, only let the Count accompany us. He will bind himself to pay you faithfully any sum that you may ask. Should you mistrust his promise I will confirm it with my oath. I am very rich myself, for my mother's fortune was bequeathed to me; but, should that fail to satisfy you, keep me as your hostage, and let the Count depart. I am young and in good health; he is old and infirm. Think of your families; consider the happiness of eating your bread without having shed human blood; think of your children, of your aged parents in distress"

Here she was interrupted by the harsh voice of Marzio; but Orazio interposed and said, "Let her speak; let us hear her out; there is some reason in her arguments."

"Listen to me," proceeded Beatrice. "If you detain the Count he will be murdered clandestinely for the gratification of some private revenge; but you will gain nothing by it, because they who employ you do not want money, but his blood. Reflect also upon the consequences, upon our parentage, and our powerful influence. All Rome

and all Naples will be on your track. You will be hunted down like wolves, and you are sure to perish by a bullet or the halter. Since the days of Sixtus V. no cavern has been left unexplored. Every rock, however inaccessible, has been stormed. How did the Cavalier Pellicioni end his career? Hanged. How Marco Spada? Hanged. How the Duke of Amalfi? Hanged: all hanged in spite of power and influence. Your fortune is in your own hands—you have but to take it."

She ceased speaking. Orazio whispered something to his comrades, and the intrepid girl was on the point of gaining her cause, when Marzio, seeing the danger, ordered Olympio to fire off his blunderbuss at a short distance, and began shouting, "The soldiers, the soldiers are coming! This is a nice time to listen to the prating of a young girl. Away, away!" and, pushing Beatrice back, he seized old Cenci, and carried him away to a subterranean cavern, where he left his victim well secured.

In the cavern there was a coarse table, a few old chairs, and a heap of leaves covered with a sheepskin by way of furniture.

Danger and imprisonment were familiar to Count Cenci, but never before had he felt so downcast: perhaps age had weakened his energies. An indefinable load oppressed his mind; and though generally insensible to fear, his customary courage forsook him.

Several hours passed away, and he began to feel the

cravings of hunger. After some hesitation he made up his mind to call out and knock at the door, when a lad made his appearance, who informed him, with a sort of mock humility, that he had been waiting outside for orders for a considerable time, not thinking it right to interrupt his meditations.

The Count recognised our deaf and dumb friend, and asked him how he had managed to recover his voice.

"St. Andrew amuses himself by performing miracles in these parts, Eccellenza," replied the boy archly.

"'Tis well. Bring me some food, my child."

The boy left, and returned immediately with provisions.

"Come hither, boy. Tell me, is it day or night?"

"I cannot tell, Eccellenza, for we are two miles under ground, and they will not allow me to go and see."

"But," remarked Cenci, "it did not seem to me a descent at all when I came in."

"That is because your eyes were bandaged and the descent is gradual."

While preparing the table the Count offered him a ducat and inquired his name.

"As for a name, Eccellenza, no one calls me by any name."

"But surely you were christened?"

"Maybe; but I do not remember it, although I daresay that I was present at the time."

"Here, take the ducat at any rate. You please me."

"But I will not take it, because we need not accept as a gift what we can take by right."

"Oh! you are also to have your share in the Count's money? Take this."

So saying, Cenci threw a stiletto at him with so much violence, that it stuck and vibrated in the door. The boy, who had watched him closely, dexterously avoided the blow. He then disengaged the weapon and put it in his pocket, saying, "I will keep it, and will return it to you as soon as my superiors will allow me."

Cenci partook of the frugal meal, and then stretched himself on the dry leaves to seek repose, from which he was soon startled, however, by the appearance of the robbers, headed by Marzio and Olympio in their ordinary dress, who without more ado fell upon him like infuriated demons, and almost murdered him with kicks and blows, Marzio reminding him of the girl at Vittana, and swearing that he would kill him by slow tortures, while Olympio insisted that he should be starved to death. When Cenci was perfectly senseless they left him for a time. On recovering his consciousness he felt some one kneeling by his side, applying water to his fevered lips, and wiping the cold perspiration from his brow.

Cenci was so weak and bewildered that he did not recognise his daughter Beatrice until after a long interval. Her angelic countenance, her tender care, and her tears of filial affection would have touched a heart of stone; but her father's heart was of adamant: he suspected her even of

having been in connivance with the robbers, in order that she might effect her escape.

Beatrice entreated him to make an effort to walk, to save himself from the terrible fate that awaited him. In spite of his acute sufferings the Count contrived to raise himself, assisted by his daughter, who all but carried him to the door, which she opened stealthily. There were about twenty robbers stretched on the ground without, stupefied by the effect of a debauch, in which the bottle marked 1550 had not been forgotten.

On reaching the open air Beatrice looked about and found a horse tied to a tree, which she assisted the old man to mount ; while she herself laid hold of the bridle and led it away, looking round occasionally to observe if his sufferings and miraculous escape had made any impression on his heart ; but the only sounds that passed his lips were oaths and imprecations. He who had sinned so grievously in this world could not conceive how anybody could have dared to sin against him. Presently he asked, "How did you manage to penetrate into the cavern ?"

"Father, would it not be better to hurry on now, and leave all particulars until you are somewhat restored ?"

"Whenever I express a wish you immediately oppose it by one of your own. You ought to know by this time that I hate opposition. Obey ! With me people must have no will of their own."

"I will obey you," answered Beatrice, lifting her eyes towards heaven. "While I was in prison Marzio told me

the dreadful fate of the girl of Vittana: he was her husband."

"How? What?"

"He said that you had killed her, and that he had taken an oath to revenge her death on you; that he had taken service in your household for that purpose, but, finding how miserable you made your family, his hatred had been changed into pity, and that he had given up the resolution of killing you at Rome for fear of inculpating us."

"And knowing all this, Beatrice, why did you not inform me?"

"How could I? You would not listen to me. When I threw myself on my knees before you, you commanded me to get into the carriage. What could I do?"

"You always presume to be in the right, Beatrice; but I still maintain that, unless you were in the conspiracy yourself, you might have informed me about that villain Marzio; but proceed."

"From all this I was convinced that the assault was not made for mere plunder, and that was my reason for offering large rewards, and following Marzio and Olympio stealthily when they dragged you away. Watching at a distance, I saw them clear a brushwood and enter into a narrow passage, from whence I heard such threats and maledictions as made me shudder. I waited for a long time, and then I approached the cavern, and saw, by the pale flickering light, that all the banditti had been carousing, and were fast

asleep. I then entered with much fear and apprehension, and found you in the adjoining cavern, stretched on the floor, bleeding, and almost lifeless. God assisted me, and you are safe."

On reaching the Rocca a surgeon was immediately procured from Tagliacozzo, and the Count offered four thousand ducats for the apprehension of Marzio and Olympio, who, he pointed out, might be seized without danger in their present torpor.

When the robbers awoke after an unusually protracted sleep Orazio said, "Those delicate wines must have turned my blood into lead. Let us see now what is to be done with our prisoner: it appears to me that after what he has undergone, even had he double the weight of sins on his soul, he deserves absolution."

"True," observed Marzio; "it is high time to celebrate a mass and sing a requiem for him now."

"Gently," remarked Orazio; "before the requiem we must get something like twenty thousand ducats out of him."

"Certainly," said Ghirigorio; "we have settled him pretty well, and the least repetition of it would send him to the next world. That Cyprus wine must have been drugged; I can hardly uphold my head. But tell me, Marzio, why did you request not to be left alone with him?"

"Because I should have strangled him at once, and then you might have whistled for the ransom. Now

you may extort as much as you like from the monster, and then you must leave him to me as agreed."

On opening the door and finding the prison empty they gnashed their teeth with rage. At that moment one of the band rushed in and exclaimed, "We are lost! Come out all, or you will be killed like so many wolves in a den."

All seized their weapons and rushed out.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SLAUGHTER.

"Con mano empia tentava
 I misteri di amore in quelle membra.
 Ma lo rispinse un Dio che lei vegliava
 Il Dio che pura se la tolse in cielo,
 Come quando ella uscì dal suo pensiero."

ANFOSSI, *Beatrice Cenci*.

DID gratitude to his angelic deliverer, or thankfulness to heaven for the great dangers which he had escaped, effect any change in Count Cenci? Immediately after his recovery he conducted his daughter Beatrice into a lonely room of the Rocca. The apartment had been used as a prison, and its general aspect presented a strange contrast to certain articles of furniture which adorned it. There was a magnificent bed, with ample damask curtains and gilt cornices. The mosaic of the pavement represented Æneas listening to Dido. On a coarse table were piled silver vases and antique ewers, beautifully chased by the hand of Benvenuto Cellini. On the bare walls names and sentences had been traced by the preceding imprisoned tenants of the dismal chamber, expressive of the horrors which they had there endured. The sky was only visible through some

bars of an iron grating, against which a plank had been nailed. The prison had swallowed its victim as the whale had swallowed Jonas. Poor Beatrice! The heaven on which you had set your affections—the heaven, conscious spectator of the pure thoughts of your soul—the heaven from which you derived such consolation in your deep sorrows—the heaven to which you so often appealed in the rectitude of your heart, and which you always looked upon as your natural home—you can now only see gleaming through those envious bars.

The rays of the sun seem to hesitate before they penetrate within, lest they should be imprisoned and detained by that iron grating as by a trap. Even the fresh air is taken from her, or rather doled out sparingly like food to the inmates of a beleaguered citadel.

The late frightful occurrence has rendered the Count cautious and pusillanimous, and when cowardice whispers in the ears of cruelty there is no limit to human infamy.

Poor Beatrice would often climb up and gaze through the grating to look at the summit of a mountain, a tree, or any object that could remind her of the beauties of nature.

The pleasure of beholding the charms of the creation has ever been granted by Providence to the most abject of animals. Cursed be the man who robs his innocent fellow man of such a blessing! Gifted with the soul of a poet, capable of vibrating to the most delicate sensations of the beautiful, she would have felt relieved had she been allowed

through mountains and valleys, like a cloud. Presently she recognised in it the form of a man enveloped in a brown cloak—a black hat was slouched over his eyes. When close to the Rocca she saw how beautiful he looked, and how he beckoned to her with his hand. Her heart had long revealed to her the form that was concealed beneath the ample folds of the cloak. There is a little chapel on the hill-side near the elm trees, and there dwells a holy hermit, to whom no afflicted heart ever appealed in vain. He consents to unite Guido and Beatrice in holy matrimony, and she offers her hand, but is lost in astonishment to find that Guido, instead of offering his in return, draws it back within the folds of his cloak. She forcibly seizes it, and finds it wet and blood-stained. She recoils in amazement. "Alas! what blood is this? Tell me." But Guido has vanished, the hermit has disappeared, and all is enveloped in profound darkness.

The door of the chamber moves silently and heavily on its hinges, and the form of an old man, shrouded in a large red cloak, appears at the entrance. He stops and listens to the feverish breathing of the sleeping maiden. Presently he moves forward. What does the miscreant contemplate? What atrocious crime is the monster going to perpetrate? He leans stealthily over her couch; the red cloak drops from his shoulders. The door again moves noiselessly on its hinges, and another man enters. He stops horror-struck. By that dim light he recognises the grim and emaciated skeleton that was stooping over the couch of

his beloved, gloating on her charms with the eyes of a basilisk.

The second visitor was no other than Guido. Rage, horror, and love convulse his soul, and his hand insensibly grasps a dagger. The Count hears a noise behind his shoulders, and quickly turns his head—something flashes across his eyes—it is death.

Guido had seized him by the hair, and the bright steel had penetrated deep into his throat. Cenci staggered back and fell on the floor, uttering a horrible groan. The blood gushed from the wound as from a fountain. Beatrice sighed heavily in her disturbed sleep, and opened her eyes languidly. Great God of heaven ! it is no longer an illusion. She beholds and recognises her lover, her features relax into an angelic smile ; but that smile fell on her Guido as the beams of the rising sun upon a marble statue. Bewildered and distracted, he pointed with the dagger to the bleeding corpse at his feet. Still she has no suspicion of the horror that awaits her. Who is that man on the floor ? What is he about ? Whence came he ? He looks like a corpse. Guido again points at the prostrate figure—she follows him with her eyes mechanically—he vanishes—a fatal light dawns upon her intellect. Heedless of her scanty clothing, she darts from her bed, shrieks for assistance, and feels that her naked feet are dabbling in blood. She stoops to raise the head of the dying man, and recognises her own father. His mouth was still agitated in the last convulsions, but his eyes were

fixed "in cold obstruction's apathy." His vision revived for a moment, then changed to a leaden stare, and all was over. The poor girl was appalled with terror, and remained motionless as the corpse before her.

Guido, as if impelled by a demon, descended the stairs, reached the room where Donna Lucretia was with Bernardino, Marzio, and Olympio, and, throwing the dagger frantically from him, exclaimed, "He is dead, he is dead!"

"Corpo di Bacco!" exclaimed Olympio, "that is a pity. You should have allowed us to settle our accounts with him."

Marzio added quickly, "We must make sure of it, however," and left the room.

What a strange compound is the nature of man! Marzio, who would have killed the Count with as much composure as he would have said his prayers, had no sooner reached the prison and perceived the loose attire of the young lady, than he retreated bashfully, came down again, and whispered something into the ear of Donna Lucretia, who immediately betook herself to the fatal chamber, and entering called Beatrice by her name. Not receiving any answer, she picked up the Count's cloak, and covered the distracted girl with it; then, taking her by the hand, she gently led her away; rubbed her temples with vinegar, washed the feet, and put her to bed.

Beatrice looked wild, and was unable to speak. Symptoms of fever were manifested, and it was found necessary

to bleed her. Some time elapsed ere she came to herself.

Marzio and Olympio proceeded to examine the body. "Look at that wound," observed Olympio; "his soul might have come out of it on horseback. Let us consider now how to dispose of the body: we must carry it to the garden and bury it there."

"Have you lost your head also, Olympio?" asked his companion. "It is not enough to bury, we must make him die somehow in a natural way. Come here; take him by the legs, I'll take the head, and we will carry him to the terrace that overlooks the garden: it leads to a certain place, and has no balustrade, so that it may appear as if he had risen during the night after having drunk more wine than usual, and had slipped and fallen down. As for the wounds nobody will come to examine them, and dead men tell no tales."

Guido and the two bravi had been admitted into the palace by Donna Lucretia for the purpose of liberating Beatrice. The night was far spent, and nobody had seen them enter. They left in the same manner, and returned to Rome at once, Guerra to his palace, and the two bandits making for the frontier, whence they intended to proceed to Sicily or Venice.

They had received two thousand ducats, and the assurance of favours and protection from the houses of Cenci and Guerra.

On the 10th of September the Castle of Rocca Petrella

resounded with groans and lamentations, the loudest being the least sincere. The inhabitants of the place came to look at the sight; the gossips collected round in a circle, and told strange stories. One related that the deceased, having been obliged to go to Benevento by the orders of the foul fiend, to whom he had sold himself seven years ago, had been lifted up in the air on a broomstick, which, as we all know, is the usual travelling conveyance of the bewitched; that while aloft he had by accident pronounced the name of the Deity; immediately the broomstick broke, and the Count was precipitated from a height of at least two leagues. Another maintained, on the contrary, that his contract with the evil one having expired, Satan had come and taken possession of him. But the reasoning of the last was destroyed by the washerwoman of Petrella, who averred that, having left her house on business that very night, she had heard a terrible noise in the air, and had suddenly seen an owl fly against her lantern and blow it out with its wings, a clear proof that somebody was passing through the air at that moment. It were needless to relate the many versions given in those superstitious days of similar occurrences—versions religiously believed, not only by old women and peasants, but even by learned men and jurisconsults. The priests and monks were, of course, deeply interested in promoting credulity by palming these wondrous fictions upon their dupes.

Presently a lackey invited all the visitors to the house, where they found Donna Lucretia in tears, and giving

orders to the curate to prepare a magnificent funeral, worthy of the chief of the illustrious house of Cenci. She invited the peasants also to accompany the procession, and promised to distribute copious alms for the relief of all the poor families, on condition that they should pray for the soul of the deceased. The body had already been removed and consigned to a coffin.

CHAPTER XXI.

NAPLES.

IN an obscure tavern at Naples two men were sitting at a table carousing and playing cards.

"You have lost the game, Don Olympio," observed his antagonist in an insinuating voice. "Consider that we began playing a little before Ave Maria, and that it is almost daylight now. Every minute that we are playing I feel as if I was on the gridiron of St. Lawrence."

"You ugly Cerberus! When you opened your mouth just now I shut it by putting a ducat into it; but I see that I have lost another game. Give me the cards, and let me shuffle them."

"I had rather that you should go home, Don Olympio, for if the guard should come, I might as well hang a stone round my neck and throw myself into the sea."

"You ugly Judas Iscariot!" screamed Olympio, striking the table with his fist so violently as to cause the glasses and bottles to fly in all directions. "This game is gone likewise; I shall lose everything."

Olympio's bottle companion, who was also the host of the tavern, had told a deliberate lie in his allusion to the

guard, for not only was he in connivance with the police, but there was not a more alert spy than himself in all Naples. He received no particular salary, but was allowed to carry on his infamous trade of gambling unmolested.

"*Tabula rasa*, all gone!"

"Never mind, Don Olympio; you'll appeal to your luck to-morrow and have your revenge. 'Whoever perseveres, conquers,' says the proverb; and that you can afford to persevere is proved by your coming every day provided with ammunition. I do firmly believe that the galleons from Peru unload their cargoes for you and King Philip our master."

"Marzio takes good care to tell me every day," replied Olympio, "that my share is gone, and that his own must soon follow. My thousand ducats and his thousand only make two."

"Do you know, Don Olympio, that you can buy a dukedom with two thousand ducats? How did you manage to earn so much money? Tell us all about it."

This ruse was too palpable even for Olympio. He gave a suspicious look around and said, "I received them for my share in fighting for the faith."

"What faith? In whose service did you fight, then, Don Olympio?"

"Oh! under several leaders."

"But who were they?"

Here our friend Olympio would certainly have struck against a rock had not one of the other gamblers

accidentally interrupted the insidious question by asking, "Why do you not bring your brave companion, Don Marzio, along with you?"

"Oh! Marzio is too great a man; he gambles with gentlemen only, and drinks with dukes, as if we had never been together in the forest of Luco."

"It was in the forest, then, that you fought against the infidels and obtained your prize money?"

"In the woods or on the seas what is that to you, you ugly Judas? Do you want to cross-examine? I'll cross-examine you."

With this he squared his elbows for an attack, but the spy prudently retreated before his colossal antagonist.

On the following evening Olympio did not occupy his usual place at the gambling table, but sat gloomily in a corner, puffing forth large volumes of smoke.

"Why did you not bring your friend Marzio with you?" asked the host. "Have the galleons of Acapulco not reached the port this evening?"

Both questions flew direct like arrows in a target; they pricked Olympio, who replied with an oath,—

"Because he wears that red cloak he thinks himself as great a man as Count Cenci himself, from whom he stole it."

"Here, Olympio, console yourself with this." So saying, the gamester handed him a jug of wine, which Olympio emptied at one draught. "You do not like me, Don Olympio. You are wrong, and I will prove it to you. Here

are a dozen ducats to try your luck again. I suspect that Don Marzio is merely humbugging you, as superiors will often do."

"Superiors indeed!" replied Olympio quickly. "What answer do you think he gave me when I informed him that I had no more money? 'If you are poor,' he said, 'go and hang yourself.' And then he requested to be informed which way I meant to go, because if I went to the north he would go to the south."

"The usual ingratitude of mankind," philosophised his new friend; "but this is enough to make a stone shed tears;" and, pretending to drink himself, he passed another jug to Olympio, observing, "As long as people want you they are your friends, but no sooner is the oyster swallowed than the shell is thrown away. But what are you going to do now? If I can help you I will. Let us drink."

"I do not know," replied Olympio; "but if I could despatch a letter to the Cenci's at Rome, I know I should obtain assistance, because they must assist me."

"They must, must they?" exclaimed the host, looking like a hyena who perceives a victim within its grasp.

Marzio had not used the precise words quoted by Olympio, but had only reminded him that his thousand ducats were gone, and that it would be better not to remain in the kingdom any longer, squandering away his own share in low taverns and cheating gambling-houses, as there would be nothing left for their voyage.

But Olympio invented a wrong for self-justification—no uncommon practice amongst vicious people, who are ever ready to resent imaginary injuries in such-like cases. Marzio considered it imprudent to contend or reason with the brutal propensities of his associate, which had grown beyond all control whilst revelling in the corruption of a large town, so he went in quest of him to soften any angry feelings until he could get him out of the kingdom, a consummation which he was determined to effect at once.

"Tell me, Olympio," proceeded the host, "are the Cenci's of Rome your bankers? I see, I see; you have treated some of their enemies to a long sleep; but there are always people who spoil the market."

"That secret remains with me," replied Olympio slyly. "I know who has killed the Count."

At that moment a stranger made his appearance: he was enveloped in a superb red cloak.

"Welcome, Don Marzio," exclaimed the host:

"He is becoming one of us," added one of the gamblers.

Marzio, surprised to find himself known, gave Olympio a side look and said, "I am glad to find that I am no stranger here."

"Don Marzio," proceeded the host deferentially, "will you be pleased to relieve yourself of your cloak? Faith, it is worth taking care of; it looks as if it had been a gift *in causâ mortis* of some prince, marquis, or count at least."

Marzio again looked at Olympio significantly, took off

his cloak, and sat down at the gambling table. He was himself well experienced in the foul practices of gamblers, and stood on the defensive, so that it proved a battle between Greek and Greek.

After a little time he complained of a headache, took his cloak, and retired without even so much as looking at Olympio, who felt much disappointed, as he had expected every moment that offers of peace would have been made to him; but Marzio, knowing his obstinacy, saved himself the trouble, and was going home to pack up, having made up his mind to leave Naples early in the morning.

Olympio hurried after him, and was followed by the spy at a distance. When Marzio heard somebody behind him he put his hand to his breast, stopped suddenly, and asked, "Who is there?"

"It is I, Marzio. Do not be alarmed; I do not join you for harm's sake."

"Harm or good, I care little; but what do you want of me?"

"Do not be angry; let us walk on, and then we can talk," suggested the diplomatic Olympio. "Do you consider it an act of good fellowship to leave me without a bajocco?"

"Olympio, I have told you often, that as long as I have anything you shall have plenty to eat and drink, but that I will never consent to have my means exhausted by dissipation, intoxication, gambling, and other vices which I need not name. Your own share of our spoil is already

gone, and you are besides indebted to me. What right have you to my money?"

"The right of a conqueror's soldiers to share in his booty," replied Olympio.

"It is well," retorted Marzio; "but I speak of right, while you speak of force, in which I am your match."

"You know what despair will do," said Olympio. "Pardon is granted, and even rewards are bestowed on the accomplice who gives timely information."

"Oh! I see, Olympio; but remember that our secret is no longer either yours or mine, and that you would be too late for the reward. 'Tis a matter of life and death. Certain words I heard at the gambling table prove it to me."

"Marzio, you must contrive a remedy for the mischief. I was in a great rage, and had drunk too freely when I mentioned something about the Cenci's."

"We are undone," said Marzio. "There is no remedy but leaving Naples immediately. Come along."

They walked on, and were still followed stealthily by the spy. Presently Marzio seized the moment while Olympio lifted his hat to the image of a Madonna, where a little lamp was burning, to plunge a knife deep into his breast. Olympio screamed out,—

"Holy Madonna, help!" but Marzio stabbed him again and again until he saw him sink down, and then said,—

"You have condemned yourself, Olympio. A peaching mouth requires an iron padlock. God grant that it be not

too late already;" and, making the sign of the cross, he added, "I shall have to answer for this some day; but the Holy Virgin knows that I have done this deed to save an innocent family from ruin."

He then walked on as calmly as if he had only just said his prayers. His nature was of that horrible mixture of devotion and ferocity so very common in those days.

Having reached his abode, changed his attire, prepared his portmanteau, and left his account on the table, he shifted his quarters to another tavern near the port, whence he proposed to embark early in the morning on any vessel that might be on the point of sailing.

The spy had seen everything from a distance, and went immediately to give information to the police.

Before daylight Marzio was on the look-out for a vessel, and found a schooner getting under weigh for Trappani. He settled for his passage with the captain, but just as they were going to weigh anchor a signal gun was fired across the schooner's bow, and the captain was ordered by a strong patrol to stop in the king's name. The skipper obeyed at once, and Marzio was seized, handcuffed, and taken before the magistrate, who addressed him thus:—

"You, then, are the impious and hardened malefactor who, after having shed so much blood in the Roman states, has committed an atrocious act of homicide in the happy realm of his Catholic Majesty King Philip, our master. I allude to the murder which you perpetrated last night, a most sacrilegious act, committed before the very

image of the Holy Virgin. I will show you presently that Naples is not Rome, and that we proceed differently here. Carmina, my love, bring me another cup of chocolate, and you, my men, take the villain to the question chamber at once, and prepare all the instruments *quoad torturam preparatoriam usque ad mortem*, the great trestle, the goat, the taxilli, the brodequin, and the cords."

When seated before a long table, with a notary by his side, and the instruments of torture methodically prepared, our worthy magistrate looked as proud as Scipio Africanus when he ascended the Capitol, followed by captive monarchs.

He gave the executioner his directions, who in his turn communicated them to his two assistants.

The height of human glory is easily reached, while there is no fathom for its infamy: even the hangman has his subalterns.

Marzio looked as if he were willing enough to die, while the magistrate darted a look of defiance at him, as much as to say, "You are indifferent and torpid, are you? We shall soon make you lively."

The notary asked him his name, age, birthplace, and the circumstances of the crime with which he stood charged; and when that formality was ended the magistrate addressed him again, saying, "Marzio Sposito, you are accused, and the documents prove your guilt, of having murdered with premeditation and barbarity the illustrious Count Francesco Cenci at the Rocca Petrella, vulgo Rocca Ribalda, aided and abetted by your companion, Olympio Seraco. Secondly,

that you have received instructions to commit that act from some of the family of the said Count. Thirdly, that you have received a reward of two thousand ducats for the said murder, viz., a thousand for yourself and a thousand for Olympio, your accomplice. Fourthly, that you are guilty of having likewise committed a theft, by robbing the said Count Cenci of a red cloak, which was found upon you when arrested. And, fifthly, that you treacherously killed your companion, Olympio Seraco, last night, by four mortal stabs, under the very image of the Madonna. Upon these five points which I have read, and will read to you again upon your request, you are admonished to confess the truth on your oath, not because justice requires any more proofs of your guilt, but for your own good in this world and in the next."

Upon this the notary took up a crucifix, read the formula of the oath to Marzio, and presented it to him.

"I will not swear," said Marzio.

"How! you will not swear? Everybody does."

"Then everybody is wrong," continued Marzio, "because it is not natural for any man to swear his own life away."

"You would have avoided the experimental torture, my friend," observed the notary quietly.

"What is that to you?" interrupted the magistrate, angrily; "perhaps he likes to try it; he is entitled to it, and nobody can refuse him the experiment—it is his privilege. Master Giacinto, it is your turn."

Master Giacinto, assisted by his two valets, began his operation with as much method as a skilful workman would employ to prepare a fine production of art. He undressed and submitted him to the torture, which, in the horrible nomenclature of the time, was called *hoisting*. A cord was passed under the armpits; the body suddenly hauled up and let down with a violence that wrenched every joint. Marzio underwent atrocious pain without uttering even a sigh, but when exhausted and released for awhile his conscience reproached him with all the horrors of his past life. He had become a bandit from dissipation and revenge; he must die in agony and despair. How bitter is life when we know not whither or to whom to address our prayers!

"In a quarter of an hour," said the magistrate to Master Giacinto, "you will recommence *cum squasso*, and if in the interim he asks to drink, you may give him a little water and vinegar."

"Signor President," said Marzio, in a broken voice, "if I make up my mind to confess can I rely upon a favour?"

"I will do all in my power," replied the magistrate, mildly; "I will recommend you to the viceroy; his Grace the duke is magnanimous, and grants favours very willingly. Meanwhile, Signor Notary, please to write down that he has made a proposal to confess; ergo, the accusations are true—a step gained that will never be cancelled."

"The favour I am going to ask," explained Marzio, "is

simply this : I wish to be led to execution at once, immediately after having confessed my sins ; and I wish to die by the axe, not by the cord."

"Is that all?" interrupted Master Giacinto, who could no longer keep silence, because it was a matter concerning his own profession. "His Highness the viceroy has the soul of a Cæsar in such matters."

"Silence!" shouted the irritated magistrate. "This is no business of yours."

"Oh! I thought it was; but I ask your worship's pardon; I am mistaken perhaps."

"As far as your first request is concerned," said the magistrate calmly, turning towards Marzio, "I will myself take care that you shall be gratified; but as for your second demand we must consult his Highness. The privilege of decapitation is no small one; it belongs to our nobility, who are very jealous of it. Still I will refer it to his Highness; so you see, my friend, you can speak out now, and tell us all you have to say."

The culprit made no answer; the intensity of his sufferings had affected his brain.

"Confess, my friend, confess," insisted the magistrate, taking advantage of his exhausted state.

Marzio, almost delirious, asked, "Where is the priest?"

"The confession to the priest must be made in proper time, but this is about the process. You must confess about all the particulars mentioned in the act of accusation."

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... that you were invited. My
... friend, all that you have to do is
... Signor Notary, and all that you
... you will prove to the world that you
... and a date of purity, your name and
... of the pen, but dropped. ...

and said, "You might have been a little more careful with the press."

and said, "You might have known the company was going to close down. It's a shame you didn't see it coming."

With his last gasp, he uttered the words, "I'm sorry." He died.

The signature of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People is on the bottom of the envelope.

1. The first of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one. It is a complex system, and the results of the system are not predictable. The system is a complex system, and the results of the system are not predictable.

him his own great merit would become manifest ; through him the mob could be entertained with that agreeable performance, a public execution—a spectacle which would make all Naples talk about him for three days at least ; finally, by this opportunity of showing his zeal, talent, and activity, he might obtain a little ribbon to his button-hole, and an increase of salary—considerations all of which made it of the utmost importance to him that Marzio should revive and die on the scaffold.

The *worthy* magistrate hurried, with the papers in his pocket, to present himself before Don Pedro Girone, Duke of Ossuna, Viceroy of Naples for Philip II., King of Spain. In passing through the ante-room he remarked, with no small annoyance, that the lackeys and guards did not appear in any hurry to announce him according to the importance of his case and person. “ Insolent servants of an insolent master ! ” he muttered to himself.

On reaching the second ante-room he had to submit to a still greater humiliation by being made to wait a long time, when at last the secretary came to inquire what he wanted. He stated that matters of very great importance made him anxious to obtain the gracious permission to confer with his Highness, upon which the secretary informed him that his Highness, being occupied at that moment with affairs of much greater importance than any he could possibly bring, could not grant him an audience.

“ The business which brought me here,” insisted the magistrate, “ is of great import.”

"I know not what your business may be, nor do I care much," replied the courtier; "but what I do know is, that it cannot possibly be equal or superior to that in which his Highness is now engaged."

The fact was that the all-powerful duke was amusing himself at that moment with a beautiful parrot, which he had lately received as a present from Cardinal Zapata from Madrid. Not that Don Pedro was a frivolous man; on the contrary, he had the reputation of being a hard-working man of business, and much devoted to his duty; but somehow his Grace had taken a great fancy to the bird, and had given strict orders not to be disturbed. Besides, extreme tension will snap asunder the strongest cords, and some relaxation is necessary even to a statesman. After having been informed of the magistrate's errand the secretary made bold to enter the room, and found his Highness gravely occupied in teaching the parrot And what was the subject of his lesson? A Spanish word which no gentleman could pronounce in the presence of a lady. History records that Don Pedro's moral and religious principles were extremely lax; so much so, that when visiting the church of Sta. Agatta, at Catania, with his duchess, where the breast of that saint, there held in high veneration, was presented to his embrace, he turned smilingly towards his consort and said, before kissing it, "No jealousy, Donna Catterina."

The priests averred that he was affected with heresy; and amongst other accusations brought against him after

his disgrace was one that he had followed the rites of Mahomet.

On being discovered by his secretary engaged in this frivolous pursuit, he turned angrily round and asked, "Inigo, who called for you?"

The secretary, although an expert courtier, was at a loss for a reply, and could only throw the blame on the magistrate by observing,—

"Your Highness, the judge of the criminal court has so solemnly assured me that the very safety of the state depended on his communicating with your Highness, that I saw myself compelled to take the papers from him and present them, on purpose to free your Grace from his importunity."

"We know of old," said the duke, taking the papers with lordly hauteur, "that a minute of rest, which the humblest can command, is denied to us. Proceed, Don Inigo."

"If it please your Highness, a bandit from the Roman states murdered his companion last night under the very tabernacle of the Madonna. He was arrested this morning, and has confessed his crime under torture. The magistrate, considering the spontaneousness of the confession, expresses his opinion that the culprit ought to be condemned to death without any farther process."

"And is this the reason why you burst into my privacy like a shell into a besieged town?"

"I entreat your Highness to condescend to consider that

the fault is not with the shell, but with those who send it."

"You are never wrong, Don Inigo. You are like the assistants at the sacrifice of Jupiter: nobody has killed the ox—the fault lies with the knife."

The courtier was in ecstasy at the beauty of the simile.

The duke took a pen, and was going to sign, but stopped suddenly and exclaimed, "By St. Iago! it is no trifle to sign a death-warrant: to pass suddenly from a world where the sun shines with so much splendour into regions of everlasting darkness, seems to me to be an ugly passage indeed. I can well understand that it must be easier to weigh the anchor of this life in January at Stockholm than at Naples in April. Night only should witness the punishment of guilt that has been committed in its lap, and I do not know with what sense of justice we ever pollute day by such sights."

All these thoughts sprung from the duke's mind, not from his heart; he only gave them utterance to divert the attention of the courtier from the obscene word which he had been teaching the parrot.

The bird at that moment repeated his lesson, and thereby increased the duke's vexation, as it destroyed the effect of his pretended philosophy. He was on the point of signing the death-warrant, with the intention of ridding himself of his interloper, when the bird, either in play or out of spite to see itself neglected, snatched the pen with its beak from the hand of the duke.

"Montezuma does not wish him to die, or rather, Montezuma reproaches the viceroy for signing a death-warrant without having examined the papers," observed the duke. "The parrot is right and the viceroy is wrong. Thanks for the lesson, Montezuma. Were I a king you should be rewarded right royally; but, being only a viceroy, I can but give you a Majorca biscuit. I ought to send you back to the Escorial, to show to Cardinal Zapata that you have become a counsellor."

On this Don Pedro opened the documents and commenced reading with attention, when the idea struck him that it would be good policy to ingratiate himself with the Pope, as his recent absolution of Henry IV. had evinced a leaning towards France. France would become stronger than ever after the cessation of her civil wars; while, on the contrary, Spain was gradually perishing of inanition, Croesus-like, with her mouth full of gold. Her fleet, which Philip II. had spent ten years in preparing, had been destroyed in the British Channel; the Netherlands were making desperate struggles to throw off her yoke; and Austria was stretching out her rapacious claws. Spain had wasted six hundred millions of ducats, had caused the loss of twenty millions of lives, had filled the world with ruin, desolation, and hatred, and retained nothing of her past greatness save her overweening pride.

"The Pope must not obtain any pretext for emancipating himself from Spain," argued his Grace. "His recent conquest of Ferrara might embolden him to lay claims to

Naples. France would gladly assist him, and he might employ the six millions of gold hoarded up in the coffers of the Vatican by Sixtus V."

The disposition of Clement VIII. was less martial than that of his predecessor. He was known to think more of the greatness of his family than of his dominions, and he was, moreover, seriously engaged in purging the states of the church from the numerous banditti that infested them in consequence of the late protracted war. But, apart from these considerations, the duke was longing to humiliate his secretary, who had overheard his lesson to the parrot.

"Don Inigo," said he, "Montezuma proves himself more humane than yourself; he persuades me to read the paper, which you have not read. It would not be wise to cut off that man's head, and thereby lose all prospect of a great drama. We must expedite him to Rome with a good escort, and forward such letters to his Holiness as will gratify his *amour propre*; for, although the crime was committed within our jurisdiction, still it is possible that it has been preconcerted by persons of high rank residing at Rome. In future, Signor Secretary, you will be pleased not to present any documents to me without having previously read and examined their contents. As for the judge, I have remarked that he often absents himself from his duty; that he is more importunate than useful or necessary; and that, moreover, his age has weakened his intellects, which were never very brilliant. We will pension him off."

Such were the consequences of the duke's having been discovered teaching an obscene word to his parrot !

Could we but withdraw the veil that shrouds the secret impulses of kings and diplomatists, we should be astounded at tracing the trivial and ridiculous causes which have often led to declarations of war, to the pillage of cities and provinces, and even to the subversion and ruin of whole nations.

The secretary left the duke's presence, bearing with him a heavy load of humiliation. Whenever an official receives a snubbing he invariably vents his rage upon his inferior ; so, on returning to the magistrate, Don Inigo abruptly told him to wait ; and in another hour presented to him a sealed document, gave him a sinister look, and bowed him out without farther ceremony.

"I would lay a wager," murmured the enraged magistrate, "that the fellow has been a bell-ringer in some convent in his own country, and now he plays the hidalgo with us, who have as much nobility in our blood as the king himself."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE VIA JULIA.

BEATRICE was walking with her sister-in-law, Donna Luisa, followed, according to the custom of those days, by two footmen dressed in black. They crossed the Piazza Farnese towards the Corte Savelli, and reached the Via Julia. In the centre of that lonely street the eye of Beatrice was arrested by a large dark building, which had no other entrance but a low gate, over which was sculptured a marble figure of our Redeemer holding out His arms, as if to say to a prisoner passing beneath, "If you are innocent remember what I had to suffer; if guilty, remember that whenever you repent, turn to me—my arms are open to receive you."

Beatrice stopped and looked at the dismal edifice; and when she was informed that it was the famous prison of Corte Savelli she pressed Luisa's arm and said, "How dreadful a place! How many bitter tears are shed within those dreary walls! The prayers of the prisoners are addressed to us in vain, and, as we know not who suffers, we feel no pity."

They approached the little bags hanging down from the

windows like nets to entrap the contributions of the charitable, and put therein all the money which they had with them.

"It is not the gift, but the conviction of the sympathy of others that must afford the greatest consolation to the afflicted," said Beatrice.

"True, my sister," observed Luisa; "it must be a great comfort to know that somebody pities those, who are immured in that living tomb; still I should not like to try the effect. I can well understand now, why visiting the prisoners is classed amongst the choicest of virtues."

Thus charitably conversing they reached their home.

Don Giacomo and his family had taken up their residence in the paternal mansion of the Cenci's, and they all lived there together under the same roof.

Beatrice was sadly downcast, and, although she endeavoured to conceal her sorrow, she had dismal forebodings of misfortunes. Many friends and relatives had visited the house to offer their condolence, but on that evening nobody had been seen. The members of the family were conversing upon indifferent matters, to avoid reverting to the all-painful subject of their father; but the conversation gradually relapsed into a pensive silence. Luisa, to divert their minds, was the first to break it.

"Come," said she, "I see that we are beset by a taciturn mood again this evening. Let us read a chapter of 'Orlando Furioso,' and thus relieve our dulness by those marvellous descriptions."

"As far as I am concerned," observed Beatrice, "I do not admire Ariosto; he is more immoral than intelligible. Moreover, the subjects which he discusses are treated too lightly. I had rather that we read the 'Gerusalemme liberata.'"

"I am of your mind," said Giacomo. "Tasso sang of battles, love affairs, superstitions, good and evil passions; in fact, his genius embraced everything. He resembled nature—ever varying and ever beautiful like a summer cloud. You see him swing in the evening breeze, changing form at every minute. Speaking of him I fancy I become a poet myself."

"Read 'Ariodante and Ginevra,' then," said Luisa, "because the story of 'Olindo and Sofronia' is too melancholy, and we are too sad as it is."

Taking down the book she presented it to her husband, saying, "Giacomo, do you read."

Giacomo commenced: "*Tutti gli altri animai, che sono in terra . . .*"

"Rather let Beatrice continue," interrupted Luisa. "She reads so well that it reminds one—

'Che spesso accresce alla beltà, un bel manto.'

"Oh, Luisa, what a graceful compliment! Do you not know that flattery is a sin, and a great one too? But I will go on, not because you praise me so undeservedly, but because I like to please you in everything."

At that moment Guido Guerra entered the apartment.

He was already looked upon as one of the family. Not having been announced or perceived, he stopped to admire the circle, and observed, after a pause, "This is an academy, it appears. Recollect that literary academies come to no good end at Rome. Witness Pomponius Letus and Platina, who were so cruelly persecuted by Paul II."

"There is no danger," said Giacomo; "we are all one family, and your joining us will only add one more to it, I hope."

"That is what I aspire to from the bottom of my heart, and I shall begin to make use of that happy privilege by craving that the lecture may be continued."

The fact that Monsignor Guerra was the betrothed of Beatrice was known and talked about throughout Rome, and the youthful nobles envied him his good fortune. Even the court was cognisant of it, and the Pope not overpleased, as he intended Guerra to represent the church at some foreign court, and do it honour by his erudition and noble birth. The celibacy of the clergy at that time was one of the most disputed points between Catholics and Protestants.

Guido had made inquiries through his friend and relative, the Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, respecting the memorial which Beatrice had endeavoured to get presented to the Pope, and had it withdrawn, from fear of exciting suspicions in one who was suspicious by instinct.

With youthful ardour Guerra offered to kiss the hand of his betrothed, but she arose abruptly and beckoned him to

the window, where they conversed in whispers for several minutes, and then came back to join the company, looking as if something had torn their love-net asunder with violence. An expression let fall by Beatrice had struck Guido like the blow of an axe: "Can I give my hand to the man who has killed my father, and do I not become an accomplice and a parricide?"

Guido, much disconcerted and alarmed, pretended to be obliged to attend to some important business, and left the company.

Donna Luisa, attributing his mortification to some of those light storms which fan the flames of love, said smilingly to Beatrice, "Dearest sister, if you throw the king of hearts away you may lose the game."

Guido on his way home met a serving-man, who was in search of him to inform him that he came from Cardinal Barberini, who requested him to accept of a pair of spurs.

"Spurs?" asked Guido in surprise. "Did he say anything?"

"No, Monsignore. On his return from the villa he found Monsignor Taverna waiting for him at his palace, and, after having conversed together for a considerable time, the cardinal opened the door and ordered me to use all despatch to find Monsignor Guerra, and to deliver the spurs to him."

After a moment's reflection Guido seemed struck by its meaning and returned home.

A general gloom hung over the family circle of the

Cencis after Guerra's departure. The children had all been sent to bed, a profound silence prevailed in the room, and everybody seemed disposed to retire; but, as frequently happens in such cases, nobody felt inclined to propose it.

All of a sudden heavy and regular footsteps and the clank of weapons were heard in the street.

Don Giacomo, much alarmed, rose up and walked towards the door, which was rudely thrown open by a number of police agents, who burst into the apartment, some of them remaining at the entrance to prevent any egress or communication with the other rooms.

"You are arrested by the order of Monsignor Taverna," said the leader of the party to Giacomo.

"Arrested! on what charge?"

"That you will know in time," answered that functionary; and, laying his hands on Giacomo's person, he began to search him from head to foot, and then asked him, "Have you any weapons about you?"

"It seems to me that you have ascertained the contrary already," observed Giacomo, while the other officials searched Donna Lucretia and Bernardino. One was going to perform the same disgraceful office on Beatrice, but she recoiled from the contact of his coarse and dirty hands, and gave him a push. The man being more than half drunk fell on the floor, which made his companions burst out into a horse laugh.

Beatrice said with dignity, "A certain deference is due to a Roman lady. I am ready to follow you at the com-

mand of Monsignor Taverna, but you must keep at a respectful distance."

Another of the police agents, strongly infected with tobacco and garlic, was going to search Donna Luisa, who in her turn looked at him in no friendly mood; but the inspector interfered by informing him that he had no order for that lady.

Meanwhile the children, awakened by the noise, were crying in the adjoining room. Luisa, perplexed between the love for her husband and children, determined to offer her breast to the baby, when she was stopped by one of the sbirri, who lifted his sword and exclaimed, "You cannot pass."

Luisa looked him hard in the face and said, "You cannot have received orders to prevent a mother from suckling her child? But if you have, if some priest devoid of natural affections did give you such an order, which I do not believe, then you will tell him that he is a monster, and you would be a still greater one for obeying him. Give place to the mother who is going to nourish her baby." So saying, she pushed aside his sword and passed resolutely on.

The whole palace was ransacked; but nothing of consequence having been found, orders were given to depart.

"Whither do you take us?" they all asked.

"You will see," was the laconic reply.

Donna Luisa, after having fulfilled her maternal duties, came back to the desolate family, consoling them as best

she could, and escorting them to the courtyard, where carriages were in readiness to drive the prisoners to their place of destination.

Guido descried the mournful train; and, overpowered by his feelings, he was on the point of discovering himself, but the same faithful valet prevented him, saying, "Mon-signore, you undo yourself without saving them. Consider that you can serve them better by remaining free."

Returning to his palace he wrote an affectionate letter to his mother, changed his dress, put money in his pocket, and directed his steps towards Porta Angelica. On approaching it he saw from a distance that every comer was closely scrutinised, so he considered it more prudent to return.

After wandering about the streets for several hours without knowing whither to go, he perceived a light in the vaults of a palace, where a number of carbonari were passing their time in playing and drinking.

Remembering Marzio's information respecting that fraternity, he descended resolutely into the cellar, and saluted them with the watchword of the innkeeper of L'Acqua Ferrata, "Viva St. Teobaldo, and those who honour him." They looked surprised at first, when one of the party, on whom Guido's countenance had made a favourable impression, asked him, "What can we do for you?"

Guido informed his new friend of his danger, and asked for advice and assistance. They led him immediately to an inner cellar, where they disguised him in one of their

own dresses and blackened his face, informing him that they were in the habit of bringing coals twice a week to Rome, and that they would depart again on the following day for the mountains, where he would be safe.

The carriage which conveyed Beatrice from the Cenci palace entered the Via Julia, and stopped at the gate of a gloomy building, where she was ordered to alight. While on the step she saw, by the reflection of the lamp carried by a sbirro, that very crucifix over the door of the prison of Corte Savella which she had remarked and commented upon only a few hours before.

The desolate girl stretched her arms towards it, and exclaimed in the fulness of her heart, "O Lord, have mercy upon me!" and then stooping down she was led through the gates, and entered that abode of misery. During the passage she had turned her head to see her relatives, but not having succeeded, she called on them by name from the distance, which made the vaults of that immense prison resound with the echo.

After threading an intricate series of dark passages the door of an obscure cell was thrown open, and Beatrice was ordered to enter.

It was immediately closed behind her, a bolt was drawn, and she was left in total darkness.

She did not move, not knowing which way to turn. She had heard dreadful tales of those infamous prisons, where traps were prepared, and people were strangled in the dark, because, being either innocent or too powerful,

they could not be publicly judged and condemned ; it terrified her very much and made her cling to the wall. Presently she heard a noise of people approaching, and beheld the revolting countenances of the jailers and turnkeys, who came to deposit a jug of water and other homely articles.

When the little door of her cell was thrown open she could see by the lights where the couch was placed, so she crossed over and sat down on its extreme end, absorbed in reverie, and motionless as a statue.

To add to her alarm, she heard a distinct sighing and deep lamentations over her head all night. It was a fellow prisoner, who was dying of asthma. The bell that tolled for his funeral in the morning reverberated painfully on her excited nerves. Poor Beatrice ! she was only beginning to taste the bitter chalice of her misery.

At a certain hour in the morning a morsel of black bread and a nauseous broth, with slices of stale meat, were brought to her. She endeavoured to examine the faces of the turnkeys, to see to what species those animals might belong. One looked like an Egyptian mummy, another had a face like a tomato from habitual drunkenness. From such beings it were vain to seek for sympathy.

Half an hour after their departure a well-dressed man entered her prison, inspected the walls, the pavement, and the windows, and then gave a side look to examine the prisoner. As he was on the point of departing she overheard him say to the turnkey, "I cannot call the

place healthy. You must transfer No. 102 to No. 9, and mind you put a few articles of furniture there; you must also provide such food as she desires, so that it be within the limits of temperance. Do you hear? I command strict obedience, on pain of severe punishment, and you know that I keep my word."

In these places humanity itself seems obliged to assume a demeanour of ferocity. Though his language was stern, still to Beatrice that man was the only one who had proved himself not wholly devoid of sensibility. She afterwards learned that he was the superintendent of the prison, and had given those orders expressly in her presence to afford her some consolation. Not having any other way to manifest her gratitude, she prayed for him.

In her new quarters she found some white bread and the cheering rays of the morning sun. On the third day two men in black visited her cell: they proved to be the physician and the notary. The former asked several questions concerning her health, felt her pulse, and then congratulated her on her strong constitution. On his way back he remarked to the notary, "I knew that it was superfluous; still I examined her conscientiously, because humanity should come before everything. Now I feel satisfied that she can undergo the torture; her pulse beats regularly, and excludes all suspicion of pregnancy."

"We must never forget," rejoined the notary, "that posterity will read our law proceedings, and it is important that they should see with what regularity, regard, and care

we have acted in the sacred rights of humanity and justice. Thank God, we do not live in times of barbarism !”

Such were their notions of humanity.

The examination-room was a very large chamber, having been used originally as an oratory. At one end was the bench of the judges, covered with black cloth ; and behind the presidential chair was an immense carved crucifix of black wood—a miserable piece of workmanship, intended to terrify rather than afford consolation to the wretched prisoner.

As no judge had yet arrived, the notary, who considered himself the very personification of order, began to put everything to rights, placing the seats symmetrically, laying the certificate of the physician on the table, and examining the crucifix. That crucifix was at times presented red-hot to accused heretics to be kissed, and when they started back from pain, a clear and double proof resulted ; firstly, the abhorrence of Christ for them ; and, secondly, their own abhorrence of Christ.

A little beyond the notary another man was getting the instruments of his office in good order. It was Maestro Alessandro, the notorious executioner of Rome, a man of athletic stature, full of muscle, well proportioned, and of an olive-coloured complexion, with black curled hair and bushy eyebrows. Many wrinkles marked his forehead—whether produced by his vulture-like nature and silent disposition or by years nobody knew and nobody cared.

His very age was a mystery. Many a decrepit old man had heard of Maestro Alessandro, the headsman, from his childhood. Perhaps it was his father or grandfather, but the common people believed and maintained that it was the same man.

In the abstract there was a certain harshness, but no brutality in the expression of his countenance—a degenerate, but still a Roman type.

Sundry poles were fixed in the room, at the top of which were several pulleys, provided with iron rings and cords; also heavy weights of lead, used to produce shocks and dislocations when attached to the feet of the victims; and many other diabolical contrivances, which might have been supplied to the judicature of those days by Beelzebub himself.

Maestro Alessandro passed them in review, and wiped off some dark red stains that had been left by the last experiment. By this time another notary had arrived, followed by two magistrates, who, after exchanging the ordinary salutations, conversed about the weather and their families. One of them, Cæsar Luciani by name, was a cold-blooded satellite of power, wicked even for those ferocious days. He complained bitterly of the gout and the want of fresh air. The other judge, who was considered a humane man, complained of having been obliged to attend to his dog all night, as the poor thing had been seized with the colic.

“Whoever is kind to dogs is kind to men,” quickly observed Ribaldella, the notary, who lost no opportunity

of flattering his superiors. He then began to read the report :—

“Four murders and six cases of theft last night, of which no traces have yet been discovered. Luckily justice is on the scent of a number of witches, of whom a striking example shall be made. Heretics are growing more numerous every day, so that we may hope to be able to deliver to the flames another Giordano Bruno; and we all know what a fine *auto da fé* a philosopher makes.”

The last witty remark was made by Luciani.

“The right honourable president!” interrupted an usher with a loud voice.

The doors were thrown open, and Ulisse Moscati entered the court with a slow and dignified step, not assumed by any vainglory, but, in spite of long habit, the good man always felt oppressed when obliged to preside in a criminal case. He had lately buried his wife and a beloved daughter of fifteen, and he felt himself alone in the world. His countenance was harsh, but under that crust of ice a rivulet of tears coursed gently towards his heart. The poor man felt a want of tranquillity, but knew not where to find it, so he continued immersed in the current of his official duties. He had the reputation of being a great jurisconsult. At this period men were considered learned and scientific when possessed of a certain stock of scholastic sophistry. Such was the policy of the Roman priests, who profited by the universal ignorance.

Hating science and philosophy, they individually and

collectively endeavoured to extinguish any bright luminary that threatened to enlighten the universe, making Rome itself retrograde towards the sunset, while other nations marched towards its rise.

Judge Moscati saluted his colleagues with much courtesy, took his seat, read the doctor's certificate concerning Beatrice twice over, and then said, "It appears, then, that we can conscientiously submit that unfortunate girl to the torture, if there should be any need of it."

"Certainly," replied Luciani.

"I entertained some doubts, because the accused is not yet sixteen years of age; and I must request your opinion, gentlemen, as to the legality of this matter before we proceed."

Luciani readily expressed his opinion:—

"I have no doubt in my own mind as to its legality, because we find it laid down that age is no obstacle to atrocity; and parricide being the most atrocious of all acts, we can most conscientiously forego the common rules in the present case. Besides, wickedness, like puberty, ripens much sooner in women than in men; and our laws declare a girl to have obtained the age of puberty at eleven, and a boy at fourteen. Nor must a question of such wickedness be decided by the number of years, or by any abstract rules, but according to proofs and facts. The solemn judges of the ancient Areopagus wisely condemned to death the child who stole the golden crown from the temple of Minerva; and I think that

you, my brother judges, will agree with me that it would be difficult to find a case of greater depravity than the one displayed by those very wicked people in the destruction of their parent. As for precedents we can find many; but I will only name that of Sixtus V., a truly great pope. The governor of Rome humbly pointed out to his Holiness that the young Florentine could not be condemned for his resistance to the Transteverine Court, because he was not of the age required by the law.

“‘If years only are wanting,’” replied Sixtus, “‘let him be executed forthwith, because we can spare him ten of our own.’”

Was Luciani right according to the justice of his time? Alas! the justice of to-day becomes an injustice to-morrow; and the man who is condemned at Florence would be absolved at Paris for the same offence.

Moscatti, not being able to oppose any valid reasons, gave orders for the prisoner Beatrice Cenci to be brought in.

When she appeared the whole court stared at her, and was overwhelmed with astonishment that such hideous perversity of mind should be found in so young and so transcendently beautiful a body. Only two had the courage to believe in her innocence: they were the President Moscati and Maestro Alessandro, the executioner.

When interrogated she replied neither with boldness

nor timidity, but as became the dignity of one who is conscious of her innocence. When Ribaldella presented the crucifix for her to take the required oath, Beatrice placed her right hand upon it and said, "I swear upon the image of our heavenly Redeemer to tell the truth; if I could not or would not, I should not swear."

"Beatrice Cenci," began Moscati, "you are accused, and the process proves it sufficiently, of having premeditated the murder of your father, Count Francesco Cenci, in complicity with your stepmother and your brothers. What answer do you make?"

"It is not true," she said, with so much candour and ingenuousness, that even St. Tomaso would have been convinced of her innocence.

"Prisoner," proceeded the president, "you are accused, and the documents of the process prove it sufficiently, of having incited, in company with the said relatives, the bandits Olympio and Marzio to kill the Count, your father, by promising them a reward of two thousand ducats, half of which was paid down, and the other half after the execution of the crime."

"It is not true," she said again with vehemence.

"We shall see presently if it is not true," whispered Luciani.

"You are accused, and it is sufficiently proved by the process, that, besides the reward, you have given to the said Marzio a red cloak, which belonged to the deceased Count."

"It is not so, gentlemen. My father gave that cloak himself to Marzio, his valet."

"You are accused, and it is sufficiently proved by the process, of having ordered the murder at Rocca Petrella on the day of the 9th of September, in the year 1597, by the command of your stepmother, Lucretia Petroni, who would not consent to have the crime committed on the 8th, as that day was a feast of the Madonna. You, Petroni, Giacomo, and Bernardino Cenci, were waiting in the adjoining room while the Sicari entered your father's chamber; but when they returned without having accomplished the act you interrogated them, and were informed by them that they would not murder a sleeping old man, whereon you reproached them with these words: 'You have already received a thousand ducats, and you are afraid of killing my father while asleep? were he awake, you would not dare to look him in the face. Since your cowardice will have it so, I will kill him myself.' The Sicari then re-entered the Count's room in consequence of your reproaches and instigations, and, while one of them held a nail on his left eye, the other hammered it into his head, and then into his neck; after which the banditti received the balance and departed while you and your mother and brothers dragged the body to a terrace, from which you threw it into the garden. What answer have you to make?"

"Gentlemen, questions of such dreadful perversity should

be addressed to a hyena rather than to me. I repudiate them with all the power of my soul."

"You are, moreover, accused, and the process sufficiently proves it, of having intrusted to the woman Lorenza Cortesi, vulgo Mancina, a sheet soaked with blood, that she might have it washed; and you are accused, also, of instigating the bandit Marzio to kill his companion Olympio, to prevent his making any revelations of your crimes. Speak openly; remember you are on your oath. Enlighten the court, and defend yourself from the accusations."

"Signori, that I was not brought up to such horrors I need hardly say. I will speak to you with the ingenuousness which my heart dictates, and you will benignantly forgive my ignorance of forms. I am not sixteen years of age. I was educated by my sainted mother, Donna Virginia Sta. Croce, and Donna Lucretia Petroni, both well known for their piety. Neither my age nor the instructions which I received can make anybody believe me capable of crimes too atrocious even for the most notorious criminals, who become hardened in depravity and misdeeds by degrees. But supposing that nature had produced a prodigy of evil in me, consider in mercy, gentlemen, that my ferocious disposition could not have been so completely suppressed, but that a portion of it must have transpired at some period of my life, before it plunged so deeply in the tracks of perdition. What I have been, and how I have lived, you can easily ascertain by interrogating my friends, relations, and servants. My life is a book composed of but few

pages. Read them, gentlemen ; turn them over, and meditate upon them. You know better than I can tell you that, to judge human actions correctly, it is necessary to examine the motives by which they are produced. For what end could I have been induced to commit so enormous a crime ? Greediness for wealth ? The greatest part of the property of the house of Cenci is entailed *in fide commesso*, reverting to the eldest son, while the daughters derive no benefit from similar settlements. My deceased father had by a will disposed of all his freehold property in favour of pious institutions ; besides, the law excludes all women from such legacies. The fortune which I derived from my mother my father could not touch, or in any way alienate from me ; and I have been told that it amounted to forty thousand scudi. You can see by this that avarice could not have been my motive. Now I will not deny—on the contrary, I will confess—that my father made me pass days of bitter anguish ; but religion forbids children to accuse their parents, so you will allow me to abstain from unworthy words. Let it suffice that, wishing to protect myself from daily persecution, and obtain a less miserable existence, no worse measure could have presented itself to my mind than a parricide, because not only the fear of my eternal perdition in a better world, but my life in this would have been full of dangers and remorse. Domestic examples, affording me the means of screening myself from paternal persecutions, were not wanting. My sister Olympia has had recourse to the benignity of the holy father, and, by getting a humble

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memorial presented to him, she has effected an honourable marriage with Count Gabrieli di Agobbio. Following her example I wrote a petition also, and intrusted it to Marzio, that he might get it presented to the Pope."

"What made you intrust Marzio with so important a document?"

"My father placed his only trust in that man. I myself was imprisoned, and I could not communicate with any other person. But supposing even that nature had endowed me with the ferocity, the motive, the evil spirit, and the disposition to commit the crime set down in the accusation, why should I have made use of steel or iron? With two thousand ducats I could easily have obtained poisons that kill in secret, destroying life like consumption, without leaving any vestige behind. But what do I say of poison? The accusation charges me with having obtained and administered certain drugs—of having medicated my father's wine so as to make him sleep on that fatal night. If so, could I not have augmented the dose so as to prevent his waking any more? And to what purpose so many dangerous machinations? Why employ banditti? Why so many accomplices, who often prove fatal, and are generally treacherous? Above all, why include Bernardino in the conspiracy, a child under twelve years of age? In what manner could he assist us? or rather, had I not to apprehend that he would prejudice us? Had there been an infant in the house of Cenci, the accusation would have made it also an accomplice, as proving sick and tired of

the milk of its mother, and crying for the blood of its father. Excuse me, gentlemen, but all this is too absurd. Don Giacomo was at Rome when my father died, and this can be proved by undeniable evidence. With respect to the cloak I have told you all I know. Of the sheet I know nothing but what I have been told, namely, that the laundress declared, that the sheet was given to her by a woman of thirty, and I am not sixteen. Gentlemen, you are conscientious men, and have much experience in such matters; therefore I doubt not but that you will reject so monstrous an accusation. Again, why use a nail or a hammer? Bandits are generally armed with pistols and daggers; nor is it very likely that they would leave their weapons behind when on the point of committing a murder. Again, why should I have dragged the body to the terrace when two strong men were at my command? I was urged on, perhaps, by a ferocious instinct. Oh, gentlemen! things out of the ordinary course of nature are not admissible, and a mother and a daughter who drag after them the body of their husband and father, like two wolves dragging a prey to their lair, would have made the very bandits recoil with horror. Your hearts, your judgment, and your experience will plead in my favour, and you will disown these frightful accusations, and ponder well before tormenting my mind with such a tissue of abominations."

Beatrice had pronounced her appeal in such mild and plaintive tones, and at the same time with such unaffected

energy, that the court was lost in admiration, and Luciani exclaimed,—

“She is a sorceress! The foul fiend is a good prompter.”

“I admonish you,” said the President Moscati, “to keep your promise to confess the truth, and to remember the sanctity of your oath. All your accomplices have confessed already; have declared themselves guilty, and have signed their confessions.”

“How? Did they not shrink from burdening their souls with infamy to avoid the torture? Oh! the torture is no proof of truth.”

“The torture no proof of truth?” interrupted Luciani in anger. “*Nemine discrepante*, it is the queen of proofs, and you will soon discover its virtue.”

Beatrice shook her head and observed, “Donna Lucretia is advanced in years, and of a weak character; she could not bear the agony, and might confess what was false. With the child Bernardino no tortures would be required—a few sugar-plums would have induced him to confess anything that was suggested to him; and poor Giacomo has been long tired of life, and has made several attempts to destroy himself. Such being the persons you have tried with the torture, surely, gentlemen, you will not found conviction on such evidence.”

“But they were not your only accomplices,” remarked Moscati; “others have confessed likewise. Marzio . . .”

“Allow Marzio to appear before me, and you will see that he dares not maintain it in my presence. Although

that man has been guilty of many crimes, I cannot believe in such iniquity on his part."

"Behold!" said the president, pointing to a recess at the other end of the court.

Beatrice turned round and perceived the horrible apparatus of torture—Marzio was suspended, apparently lifeless, from one of the poles. She trembled from head to foot. At a signal given the culprit was let down, and restoratives were applied, which made him recover gradually. The moment he beheld Beatrice he collected his remaining strength, staggered towards her, and fell almost at her feet.

"Oh, dear Lady Beatrice! I still deserve your pity, for I am wretched indeed."

"But why, Marzio, did you accuse me? What have I ever done to you that you should rob me of my good name?"

"Oh!" sobbed the unfortunate man, "I perceive too late that innocence alone can give contentment. I chose a different path, and have been the cause of my own ruin and that of others. I can bear my own anguish, but not that of an innocent being like yourself. I have killed Olympio because I was apprehensive that his wickedness might do you wrong. I swear now, by the Providence who is about to judge me, that it was not my intention to cause you any injury. Driven to frenzy by atrocious sufferings, I heard not what was read to me, and cared not what I affirmed. I con-

fessed all they asked, provided they would have me put to death at once. They broke faith with me, and perverted my words into daggers to pierce the hearts of innocent beings"

"Signor President," interrupted Luciani, "I do not think that we have come here to hear a pastoral between Amaryllis and Melibœus."

"Be patient, gentlemen," mildly admonished Moscati ; "consider that we possess the frightful power to cut short their words with the axe. Let us, at least, allow them the consolation of tears."

"They will have time enough for tears when returning to their prison. Meanwhile, Signor President, allow me to point out to you that two hours have already elapsed, and that we have come to no conclusion," again observed Luciani.

"We are paid by the state to do our duty," retorted Moscati, "and do it we must. You, however, Signor Luciani, are welcome to retire."

Luciani remained, and Moscati addressed himself to Marzio.

"Accused, do you or do you not rectify your confession? Answer quickly."

"Signor, the punishment you can now inflict on me will be severe, but of short duration. I shall soon appear before a greater tribunal, where no confessions and no witnesses are required. The little life that remains to me can be curtailed, but not prolonged. Hear, then,

the truth, as it is known to Him who will judge me and yourselves. These are my last hours—they are acutely painful; but I bless them, because they afford me the opportunity of testifying to the innocence of this heavenly child. Francesco Cenci, her unnatural father, whom you all knew, for having trampled on all divine and human laws—laws which appal the most hardened criminals—exceeded in perversity all that I can here repeat. Horror of horrors! he loved his own daughter. Imprisonment, hunger, blows, corruption, flattery, and abominations were tried in vain. I felt compassion for that unfortunate child, and exterminated the monster, with the aid of some of my companions, just as he was going to perpetrate an act, the statement of which would make your flesh creep with horror. Lady Beatrice was awakened by the noise. The sheets of her bed were soaked in blood, but she saw it not—she had fainted, and was carried away in convulsions; nor did she give those sheets to the Mancina. Olympio, one of my accomplices in that tragedy, was killed by me—how and why I have already stated at Naples. The other accomplice escaped. This is the truth—all else is false. You can now treat me as you please. I only thank God from the bottom of my heart that He has granted me breath enough to make this statement before I expire.”

“Tell me, Signor President,” whispered Luciani to Moscati, mysteriously, “do you not think with me that she has bewitched him?”

Moscato shrugged his shoulders and looked him full in the face.

"Well, well," continued Luciani, "I know you do not believe in witchcraft. You are imposed upon by the dark lights of the age—lights of philosophy, as they are erroneously called, but very pernicious lights for all that."

Moscato was a pious man; and witchcraft being an article of faith in those days, he asked Luciani sternly,—

"Pray, Signor Auditor, what right have you to suppose that I believe not in witchcraft? I believe in it fully, but cannot see what that has to do with the business before us."

He then turned towards Marzio and asked, "Do you persist in your retraction?"

"I do," replied Marzio firmly.

"Torture definite, then," exclaimed Luciani.

Moscato pulled out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his forehead.

Torture definite implied the application of torments *usque ad necem*.

Again was the poor wretch seized, and his dislocated joints were racked by the executioner. He was suspended full six yards from the ground; his tortured limbs shivered and cracked with the tension of the cords; his eyes looked as if about to burst out of their sockets. Suddenly the hangman loosened the cords, and the culprit was precipitated to within an inch of the ground. The jerk was frightful. The wretched man uttered but one shriek: it was one of

Maestro Alessandro's very best jerks. He proceeded to inspect his victim with apparent satisfaction.

Beatrice hid her face with her hands and exclaimed, "Horrible! Oh, horrible!"

"Another," said Luciani.

"It is scarcely necessary," replied the executioner; "the last jerk has settled him."

"How settled him? Why did you kill him? How dare the fellow die before making his retraction? Let us see; perhaps he is not yet dead."

Luciani was rising to examine the body, when Moscati indignantly seized his arm, and reminded him that he was a judge, and not an executioner.

Beatrice shivered from head to foot. Presently she made a violent effort, walked resolutely towards the victim, and thus addressed him: "Miserable man! you could not save me; but I will forgive you, and I will pray to heaven for your pardon. You have sinned much, but you have also suffered much. You have not lived a virtuous life, but you have died for the truth. I envy your death. Alas! my life is so wretched that I envy the dead. I can show my pity in no other way than by rendering you this last pious service; but I render it you from my heart."

So saying, she wiped the blood from his lips with a handkerchief; then turning to the jailer she said, "Let us return to the prison;" but, in spite of her efforts, her limbs refused their office, her whole body shivered, and she staggered and supported herself against the wall.

Maestro Alessandro doffed his cap respectfully and said, "Signora, I am aware that you may not touch me. Would to God I may never have to touch you! You require support; if you will allow me I will call somebody on whom you may lean. 'Tis the offspring of a bad plant, born in a prison; but still it is a flower that might be presented to the Madonna."

He gave a shrill whistle, and a young girl presented herself. Her look was wild and unearthly, but her features comely; her complexion sallow, as if from long confinement. Her father thus addressed her: "My dear Virginia, offer your arm to this lady—she is very miserable."

The girl gave a look expressive of deep sympathy as she offered her support to Beatrice, who accepted it with gratitude.

Maestro Alessandro had given the last terrific jerk with the deliberate, but merciful purpose of despatching and putting the poor wretch out of his misery. By so doing he sacrificed a bonus of fifty scudi, which was no trifle for an executioner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VATICAN.

ON that night it was in vain that Moscati courted slumber by closing his eyes. His feverish imagination still presented to him the image of the desolate Beatrice, whilst an inward voice seemed ever whispering, *She must be innocent*. At last he addressed himself to heaven and prayed.

On the following morning he presented himself at the Vatican, got himself announced, and was ushered into the presence of his Holiness. Clement VIII. was seated on his throne, the Cardinals Cinzio Passero and Pietro Aldobrandino, his nephews, standing by his side. His dress was of red velvet, trimmed with ermine; his robe of the finest crape. The cowl also was made of red velvet; his toga, stockings, and shoes (on which a golden cross was embroidered), were of white silk.

The foot of the servant of servants was reposing proudly on a red velvet cushion, ornamented with gold tassels, looking as if commanding the osculation from everybody who approached. Moscati was too good a Catholic not to perform this imperative duty, and then opened the question of the Cenci trial with ingenuous frankness. He explained

his doubts about the evidence, exposed the little reliance to be placed on the different statements, adverted to the age of some of the accused, the discordant and contradictory facts, dwelt upon the affecting defence of Beatrice, and went even so far (no slight boldness for those times) as to question the efficacy of proofs resulting from torture, particularly as Marzio had made his confession while on the rack, and retracted it afterwards under a torture that was fatal to him. The Cenci's themselves, he submitted to his Holiness, with the exception of the girl, had partly confessed, but subsequently declared that their confessions were made to obtain relief from agony; and, finally, he exalted the candour and marvellous eloquence of Beatrice as something stupendous and irresistible, and as having produced on his mind a conviction of her innocence.

He said that conscience had urged him to make this statement to his Holiness before proceeding further in the matter, feeling as he did great remorse and compunction for having put Bernardino to the torture, he being not twelve years of age.

While Moscati explained the case with much warmth the two cardinals exchanged looks several times—looks that forbode no good. The Pope himself repeatedly lowered his eyebrows, but, accustomed to dissemble, he said in a benevolent manner, "Signor President, I commend your humane disposition, and will give my most serious attention to this case. Receive my apostolic benediction, and please to return to-morrow at the same hour."

Moscatti left the Vatican more oppressed than when he came, knowing well the insidious manners of the court of Rome.

When the worthy man returned on the following day, he was informed by the chamberlain that his Eminence the Cardinal St. Giorgio, the Pope's favourite nephew, was willing to give him an audience; an information that only confirmed his evil forebodings.

When we discover that our endeavours to do our duty are useless it is a consolation to know that we have done our best.

While but still a youth the Cardinal St. Giorgio had accompanied the Cardinal St. Pancrazio to the court of Poland, and was early initiated in the manoeuvres of diplomacy.

He received Moscatti very courteously, insisted upon his taking a seat near him, and said with apparent feeling,—

“I am delighted, Signor President, to be able to assure you that his Holiness was much edified by your rational observations in the case of the Cenci's. It is not only a proof of the soundness of your judgment, but also of the excellence of your heart. The Supreme Pontiff is determined to examine this matter with mature deliberation. He is very reluctant to have recourse to the harsh measures of Pope Sixtus V., of blessed memory. At the same time his Holiness deprecates the too great leniency of Pope Gregory, particularly since the wars of Ferrara have caused so many noxious weeds to disfigure his garden, for which he feels

deep grief. His exalted position makes him answerable before his Creator for the safety of his flock. In the case of the Cencis we cannot question the righteousness of the proceeding without offending our sense of justice. His paternal heart expressed much concern in finding how your health has suffered in the service of the state, and also from heavy family afflictions. It is his earnest desire to alleviate your burdens as much as lies in his power. He particularly instructed me to communicate to you his satisfaction with your devotion and past services."

"Alas!" replied Moscati, "there are pains men cannot console. God alone can relieve them by death."

"Poor man!" exclaimed the cardinal; "I am only astonished that with such domestic afflictions you can still fulfil your official duties, which are so melancholy of themselves, and of a nature to crush rather than to relieve a broken spirit."

"True enough, your Eminence; but I shall persevere as long as I can, because I believe that there is no difference between a soldier and a magistrate: one must not abandon the field of battle, and the other must remain on his bench."

"Ay," replied the wily cardinal, "but what may be considered a high sense of duty on the part of a subject, would become an act of cruelty on the part of a sovereign. The ancient Romans, when reaching a certain age, called by them *senium*, retired from public duty. All living creatures seek repose in the evening."

"I should certainly wish to follow the laws of nature, your Eminence, not so much for the sake of rest—we shall get enough of that in the next world—but to prepare myself by meditation for that end which is common to us all."

"First of all," answered the crafty prelate, "allow me to congratulate you, my dearest brother in Christ, for listening to the voice that comes from above—nothing but good can follow. The holy father is sure to approve of it."

"Since your Eminence deigns to encourage me thus, and to console my afflicted heart, I am ready to confess that for a long time I have harboured the desire of joining some religious order."

"There are so many orders in our holy Catholic Church," rejoined the cardinal, "with whom the afflicted find consolation and repose, that one can hesitate only in the choice. There are the friars of St. John, consecrating themselves to the poor and infirm. Then there are the Augustins, an order of preachers; the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who are considered the props of the falling church. But upon reflection, all these orders belonging to the militant fraternities, do not correspond with your age and your studies. The Benedictines, consecrated to a life of contemplation, are looked upon as the most distinguished order of Christianity; so I shall suggest to you to join them, unless you should give the preference to the holy company of Jesus."

"What! the Jesuits?" asked Moscati in surprise.

"Just so," continued St. Giorgio. "Who more than they have deserved well of the church? The Dominicans and the Franciscans supported the falling edifice, but the Jesuits restored it when in danger. Who has struggled, fought against, and conquered Luther, Calvin, Zwinglius, and the other firebrands of heresy? They are as necessary to papal supremacy as the teeth are to our mouths. I know what I am advancing. The Jesuits alone understood the danger of a disunion between the Pope and the Emperor, and, in turning their knowledge to account, they combined the cunning of the fox and the simplicity of the dove."

"The Jesuits certainly are men of great merit," humbly observed Moscati; "but I have been thinking of the Girolamini."

"Well, well, if you feel a vocation for St. Girolamo, you must listen to the voice of the Lord, and you must not put off for to-morrow what you can do to-day. Here are writing materials, my beloved brother; write a memorial to his Holiness, and rely on my best services."

Moscati, having written out and signed a short memorial, presented it to the cardinal, who received it with a suppressed smile.

On his way home Moscati meditated upon what had occurred, and discovered how the cunning prelate had taken advantage of his troubled state of mind. He nevertheless looked upon it as the only possible way to disengage

himself from that dreadful suit of the Cenci's, which he considered to be a vile conspiracy. Favours, pensions, and other similar advantages were not mentioned in his memorial. The Pope being avaricious reasoned thus : " He asks nothing, consequently he wants nothing. Besides, what can a poor monk require ? He is well to do in the world, and has received government pay for forty years. A pension granted would almost nullify the spontaneousness of his act ; therefore he is better without it, and I need not put my hands in my pockets."

When the cardinal presented the memorial the Pontiff only laid it on the table, put his tongue out (his peculiar mode of smiling), and said to St. Giorgio, his confidential diplomatist, " Now, Cinzio, look after the other."

The cardinal's nephew lost no time in sending for Luciani, and informed him, on his arrival, that the holy father, his glorious uncle, never ceased praising him, not only for his learning, but for that salutary severity by which he expedited all public business. As for himself, he added, he knew very well in what high esteem Pope Sixtus held him, and how he recommended him before his death to the present Pope, as the only man to be employed in difficult emergencies, for which reasons he had been instructed by his Holiness to promote him, and to intrust him with the cause of the Cenci family, which had been so scandalously protracted, although the proofs of guilt were clear and abundant ; that his Holiness had consequently conferred

on him full power to break through all impediments, so as to satisfy the people of Rome and the world at large that the present Pope deserved the title of the restorer of justice.

"You see, your Eminence," replied Luciani, "with such a president as old Moscati we could not have enticed a spider out of his hole. He has his head full of absurd scruples, and is besieged with such ridiculous remorse that I myself hardly knew where I was. Only imagine, your Eminence, he would not allow us to apply to Beatrice Cenci the preparatory torture, called *momentibus indeciis*, and when I pointed out to him the possibility of her being bewitched he shrugged his shoulders as if I had pronounced something heretical. Her speech was certainly very extraordinary for so young a girl, but your Eminence knows very well, that when the fiend enters into a person he invariably confers the power of oratory."

As it was against the interest of the cardinal to enlighten Luciani on that subject he merely shook his head.

"As far as I am concerned," Luciani continued, "I am used to do things quickly and well. For instance, when Pope Sixtus V. ordered me to Bologna to look after that matter of Count Pepoli, I despatched his case in less than a week, and beheaded him before the end of 1685, in spite of his wealth and high connections. A strong party in his favour had prevented any witnesses from appearing against him, so that there was some danger of his being released

from want of proofs, when the Pope ordered me to Bologna to tell the judges that, unless they hanged him immediately, his Holiness would have them hanged themselves. Thus driven into a corner, to hang or to be hanged, they allowed him to be executed; and they did well. Still justice was injured by past delays; for what are the laws of a good government? Identical with the duty of the subject; for who makes the law? Of course the sovereign; therefore his will is law. To lay it down, publish it, and print it, is only the form, not the substance; and Pope Sixtus, of blessed memory, knew how to govern. There were upwards of five hundred memorials presented to his Holiness in favour of Pepoli—amongst them one from the Count himself, wherein he claimed the privilege of his rank to be beheaded, and not to be hung. Sixtus granted that petition, and extended his benevolence so far as to allow the culprit to walk to the scaffold with his sword. But still can I not understand that his Holiness should have recommended me on his deathbed, as he was far from being satisfied with my services, in spite of all my zeal. He certainly was a great pope, but when angry there was no possibility of appeasing him."

His Eminence had stated a deliberate falsehood; but he was not a man to be disconcerted about trifles, so he observed, "True enough, Signor President; but when his first anger was over, being a man of astute sense, he often recovered himself; and this instance is a proof, because he endeavoured to retrieve his error before his

death. But tell me, Signor President, how did it happen that you fell into disgrace with that great pope?"

This last question was put purposely to lead the attention of Luciani into another channel.

"Your Eminence must know that, tired of common executions, his Holiness was tormented by an inveterate mania to bring a prince to the scaffold; and that frenzy took such strong possession of his mind that one day, while reading about the captivity and execution of Mary Stuart, he exclaimed, 'O Elizabeth! you are a happy queen. Heaven has conceded you the honour of having a royal head cut off.' While in that mood fortune favoured his desires. The Signor Ranuccio Farnese, son of his Highness Alessandro Farnese, the reigning Duke of Parma, was detected wearing arms in the streets of Rome in contravention of the laws. His Holiness had obtained the information from his spies, and had him seized and dragged to the Castle of St. Angelo. The law was absolute, and the transgression manifest. Still it created a great sensation, and everybody but those who knew Pope Sixtus expected his release, on account of the credit of Cardinal Farnese at court, the great merit of his royal ancestors, and the tender years of Signor Ranuccio. Sixtus, however, was determined to make an example, and said to those who reminded him how well the duke, his father, had deserved of the church, nobody knew his services better than he did, but the merits of the father could not screen the son. To others,

who submitted to him that age might be pleaded in extenuation, he replied that it only aggravated the fault, since, if he dared to transgress the laws while so young, what would he not dare when he attained an age of discretion? In short, it was a pleasure to hear him plead; he was like a bull in the arena tossing the dogs into the air. Cardinal Farnese, a wise man, as your Eminence knows, presented himself at the Vatican, and exhorted his Holiness not to visit his family with so great an affliction. The Pope, to avoid farther importunity, wrote an order in his presence to the commander of St. Angelo, requesting him to deliver the prisoner to the cardinal at two o'clock precisely; and immediately after the departure of Farnese he despatched a command for the instant execution of the culprit. However, the cardinal's perspicacity was wonderful. He went at once to the castle, bribed the superintendent to alter the clock, and then, presenting himself with the order to the commander, easily obtained possession of the prince's person, hurried out of Rome with his prize, and never stopped till he reached Lombardy. That trick was the cause of my disgrace, because, when I went to St. Angelo at one o'clock, the prisoner was gone; and when I presented myself on the following morning to his Holiness to make my report, I found him in a violent passion, intimating to me that I might consider myself most fortunate if my dilatoriness did not cost me my head."

"You certainly are an injured man, Signor President,

and it will afford me very great pleasure to explain this matter to his Holiness, my uncle, who has already charged me with the gratifying order to promote you to the place of Moscati. In his name I urge you, Signor Luciani, to use the utmost activity in this scandalous trial, which causes so much grief to the Christian soul of his Holiness, while his conscience feels strong compunction that, in dealing with the perpetrators of an atrocious crime who have confessed their complicity, idle formalities should so long have impeded the vindication of justice."

"I had the honour to point out to your Eminence before, that there is evidence enough to hang the whole family at once ; besides, the will of his Holiness is my law," added Luciani as he departed.

The new president, once installed in place of Moscati, gave immediate orders for applying the torture to the unfortunate Beatrice.

While writhing under its agonising infliction, the unfortunate girl continued to protest her innocence, her noble nature rising superior to any weakness or degradation. When exhausted and almost lifeless she was conducted, or rather carried back, to her cell by Virginia, the executioner's daughter. After a respite of three days, the sbirri came again to fetch her. Before leaving her cell she addressed herself to Virginia :—

"Listen, my sister. I am again summoned to undergo new torments. I feel that I shall succumb under them like poor Marzio. Alas ! I had a frightful presentiment already that a similar fate awaited me. Dearest Virginia,

I do not mean to recompense your kindness towards me, but I will leave you a memento of so unfortunate a being as myself. Take this little cross ; it belonged to my blessed mother, Donna Virginia. Should I return alive from the torture you will restore it. I have yet something more to say Yes, listen to me, Virginia : I must tell you." (Here she coloured and spoke in a whisper.) "I had a lover—he was good and handsome. We loved each other sincerely, but we could never be united in this world—never. I even doubt if we shall meet in heaven. Alas ! something frightful has happened, not through my fault. Take this small image, and endeavour to get admission into the presence of Cardinal Maffeo Barberini. Tell him that it comes from me, and he will insure its being delivered to his friend. You will also tell him, that I have often prayed before it for the salvation of that friend. Bear all this well in mind, dear Virginia, and forget not my last request."

The sbirri pressed her to follow them, rudely observing that it was not proper to keep the court waiting for a prisoner.

Poor Virginia, half suffocated with tears and emotion, escorted her to the door, and embraced her tenderly.

When Beatrice turned her head from a distance she saw the devoted girl kneeling before the image of the Madonna.

On reaching the court, the first object that struck her with painful surprise was the presence of Luciani in the presidential chair in place of Moscati, resting both fists on

the table in the attitude of a mastiff, and addressing his colleagues thus :—

“Wonderful ! I had her examined before my own eyes, although, *honestatis causâ*, I turned my head to the wall. No signs were discovered ; still I cannot persuade myself that she is not bewitched. I did not order her to be cropped, because Del Rio, Badino, and many other great authorities in witchcraft, maintain that the devil has no power on the cranium. Nevertheless, we will try the *tortura capillorum* to-day, and regulate our opinions upon its results.”

He then blandly addressed Beatrice, who looked pale and feeble :—

“Gentle lady, my heart has suffered much to have been obliged to apply the torture to you. The duty of the magistrate, the feeling of the man, and the piety of the Christian urge me alike to recommend you to confess at once. What good result can you gain by such obstinacy ? I have told you often, and now repeat, that there are abundant proofs for conviction ; you are condemned by the confession of all your accomplices. Endeavour to obtain the mercy of the holy father by a candid admission of your guilt. His Holiness has the keys of heaven, and is more gratified in opening than in closing its gates. Do not again compel me to use rigour ; consider that what you have as yet suffered is nothing when compared to the torments justice inflicts upon stubborn criminals.”

“Why tempt me ?” said Beatrice calmly. “Is it not

enough to rack my body, without seeking to degrade my soul? If it is your duty as a judge to act thus, take my body—it is yours; you have it in your power, and may tear it to atoms at your will; but the soul was given to me by my Creator. It belongs to me; and rather than be terrified by your threats, or deceived by your blandishments, that soul will enable me to support all and any torments you can inflict.”

On this Luciani shouted, “*Ad torturam, ad torturam capillorum!* Where is Maestro Alessandro? He ought always to be here when I preside. Take his place, Carlino. You are an able young man; we will see how you can fulfil his duties.”

Carlino replied, “We will do our best, Signor President;” and, seizing the unfortunate girl, he entwined her long tresses in a cord, by which he lifted her from the ground, and then twisted them so violently and so rapidly, that she looked as if her eyes were going to burst from their sockets, and the skin of her face to split open.

“Confess the truth,” roared Luciani.

“I am innocent.”

“Give her a shake; another and another.”

Carlino did as he was commanded.

“Will you confess now?”

“I am innocent.”

“No? Give her the canulus, Carlino.”

“O God! O God!”

“Confess your guilt, I tell you.”

"O Lord of heaven, assist your innocent creature!"

"Carlino, go on!"

"Oh, my mother! a drop of water! I am dying! In mercy a drop of water!"

"Confess."

"I am I am innocent."

"Da bravo, Carlino!" exclaimed the assassin, who was called a judge in those days.

"Alas, alas! what pains! what frightful sufferings!"

"Confess, you wicked one."

"I am innocent."

"The strings, then."

At this last order of Luciani even the assistants of the executioner stood aghast. They looked upon the president as a man out of his mind, for that torment consisted of a number of fine strings, which penetrated the flesh, and cut the nerves and veins. They thought that it could not be applied in her present state without very great danger to life. At that moment Maestro Alessandro entered the court, and, looking calmly at the spectacle before him, he endeavoured to button his jacket; but somehow or other he trembled, and could not find the right button-hole. Beyond that he did not display any emotion when he addressed himself to the president and said, "Signor President, let us understand matters clearly. Do you wish her to confess or to die?"

"She must confess," replied Luciani; "I would not have her die."

“In that case she can sustain no more torments to-day,” concluded the executioner.

An idea struck Luciani. It must have been a diabolical one, since it made him smile, when he said, “Suspend the tortures, then, by all means, and give her some restoratives. You, gentlemen colleagues, please to wait for my return.”

In less than twenty minutes the corridors through which Luciani had gone resounded with the clank of chains, and Lucretia Petroni, Giacomo, and Bernardino Cenci entered the court. They all looked wan and haggard, like persons who had undergone great sufferings. Luciani followed them like a butcher driving cattle to the slaughter-house. They had not seen each other since the night when they were arrested, and the moment the bolts of their cells were unlocked they rushed into each other's arms. The grief and affection of those unfortunate beings expressed themselves in convulsive embraces. Even Luciani did not interpose, but he informed them that the obstinacy of Beatrice was the only obstacle to closing the trial and obtaining the holy father's mercy—a mercy ready to burst forth like water from the rock, struck by the rod of Moses, the moment her contrition could be made manifest. He also informed them, that he felt deeply for having been obliged to use tortures on poor Beatrice, but had been compelled by the duty of his office; that he had now summoned them to assist him in persuading her to confess, as the only means of avoiding ulterior and more severe inflictions.

It is easy to deceive those who are sanguine in their hopes : sufferers require consolation, and are ever ready to believe what they desire. Lucretia and the two brothers confided in the magistrate's words, who had promised them his zealous advocacy with his Holiness. Thus deceived, he pushed them into the court, and walked after them in triumph.

Are the victories of force more glorious than those of fraud ? It appears to us that force and fraud were twins born of injustice.

When the poor prisoners saw the lacerated form of Beatrice, who had fainted, they broke out in convulsive sobs and knelt down beside her, kissing the hems of her garment. They did not dare to touch her hands or face for fear of increasing her agony. It was heart-breaking to see them thus, as if in adoration of an angel or a saint.

On returning to consciousness a deep and painful groan convulsed her bosom. She fancied herself in heaven, and was confirmed in that opinion when, on opening her eyes, she beheld the dear pale faces of her beloved relatives, who were kneeling around her. "Thank God !" she exclaimed, "I am dead at last." Unfortunately the spasms of her sufferings reminded her of her error.

"Oh, my beloved ones, what a meeting is this !"

Some time elapsed before any of them could reply. Presently Giacomo addressed her. The clank of his chains vibrated painfully on her ear.

"Sister," he said, "I conjure you, for the love of our Lord, do not allow yourself to be thus torn to pieces.

Confess what they wish us to confess, as we have done. I see no other remedy but a pretended confession. At all events it will save farther tortures, and it will lead us to a better life. God's wrath hangs over our heads; we struggle in vain against fate."

Bernardino lifted his little hands and said, "Confess, Beatrice, as you love me. Say, dearest, what these gentlemen wish you to say. The Signor President has promised to set me free, and to allow all of us to return home for the vintage."

Donna Lucretia said to her in her turn, "Dear daughter, trust in the Holy Virgin; she consoles all the afflicted. We are sinners all of us, and nobody is guiltless."

While they were thus addressing her, Beatrice turned her head towards each of them in succession, and looked surprised and sorrowful. Her eyes met those of Luciani, who could not dissemble his malicious exultation. Rage, disgust, and an unutterable horror agitated her soul; she made a violent effort to contain herself; divers conflicting emotions traversed her forehead like clouds passing over the disc of the moon. Recovering slowly, she admonished her relations in the following terms:—

"I have heard with deep sorrow and affliction that you have not been able to resist the tortures, and that sufferings have made you put in jeopardy your good fame. I will not make you any reproaches; but why do you wish me to become a partner in your shame? I bear the crown of martyrdom on my head with more glory than if it were a

crown of diamonds. The Holy Scriptures teach us that we must not destroy our fair fame, that essence of our souls—the only thing we can transmit to posterity, who honour it if unsullied, but abhor it if stained with crime. Tacitus relates that pagan Rome saw a woman suffer unheard-of tortures under Nero, rather than divulge the secret of the conspirators. Shall I, then, a Christian girl, not show strength enough to support my sufferings, knowing myself to be innocent? Unhappy ones! what do you expect to obtain from your cowardice? Your lives, perhaps? Do not you perceive, then, that our lives are sacrificed beforehand for a settled motive, and that our deaths will not prove satisfactory unless our infamy is obtained likewise? Can you not see through this motive? No; you cannot fathom this abyss of iniquity. I will tell you, then: it is avarice, greediness. The wolf has tasted the substance of the Cenci's, found it palatable, and is eager to devour it. Your wealth is your crime. You may lose your wealth and your lives, but your tormentors cannot rob you of your good name—you yourselves have thrown that away. Let them take my life and my wealth—those are frail things in the power of others; but my fame is in my own power, and that they shall never succeed in ravishing from me. While everybody on this earth has abandoned me, two angels will uphold me: one takes innocence in his custody, and the other rewards constancy. Believe me, my own dear ones, this is no illusion—it is faith! They sustain me under the anguish of torture, and they promise to carry me up to

my Creator on their blessed wings as soon as these torments are over. Farewell earth ! thou composition of mud and blood. Farewell whirlwind ! composed of wicked atoms, called mankind. A beam of heavenly joy is shining on my soul. It heals all pains. It gives me a foretaste of heavenly bliss."

After having pronounced these inspired words she dropped exhausted on a seat, and again fainted.

A ray of the autumn sun, reflected from one of the high windows, chanced to fall on her pallid features, and made her resemble a departed saint hallowed by the crown of martyrdom. None of those who witnessed this touching scene dared to breathe. Even Luciani had made the strange discovery that he was moved ; the other judges looked grave ; and the notary pretended to mend a pen, but, in reality, it was to conceal a tear.

When Beatrice recovered her senses her relations addressed her in admiration :—

"Oh, Beatrice ! oh, holy angel ! you have pointed out the right path to us, and we will follow it."

Beatrice made a violent effort and said, "Learn how to die."

"So we will," exclaimed Giacomo, turning towards the judges. "We are innocent. We have neither killed our father, nor did we cause others to kill him. Our confessions have been extorted from us by torture alone."

The countenance of Beatrice expressed joy at this spirited disavowal.

"Martyrdom in this world," she said, "is glory in the next. Persevere, my dearest, and die as the faithful died."

By this time Luciani had shaken off the momentary temptation to become humane. He was influenced by the reflection that, instead of being benefited by his new experiment, he would be a loser; so he addressed himself to Giacomo.

"Presently we will cast up our accounts again with you, and then we shall see how facts will prove your words." Then turning to Maestro Alessandro he said, "Apply the torture of the *taxillo* to her."

"Do I understand you rightly, Signor President? Did you say the *taxillo*?"

"Exactly so, the *taxillo*. Is there anything extraordinary in this order?"

"Nothing," replied Maestro Alessandro. "I only fancied that I had misunderstood you;" and he prepared the *taxillo*. It consisted of a sort of wooden wedge, cut in the manner of a cone, large at the base, and very sharp at the end, which had been soaked in turpentine and pitch. It was the invention of Satan transformed into a Dominican friar of Spain, that unhappy country where superstition raged so violently, that even now, when other nations march onwards towards civilisation, the Iberians still represent to the world the centaur, half man and half beast.

The executioner took off the stocking of Beatrice: her

foot looked as if chiselled by a Phidias. She looked calm and resigned. Not so her relatives, who shuddered without comprehending the operation. Alas! they will soon be enlightened. Maestro Alessandro introduced the sharp wedge under the great nail of Beatrice's toe, and then set it on fire: it burned, crackled rapidly, and penetrated the flesh. Frightful was the pain produced by that barbarous torment. Human nature could not bear it. Beatrice, partly from the apprehension of distressing her dear ones, and partly from a strong desire to show them an example of fortitude under the most acute sufferings, suppressed her spasms and was silent. But it was beyond her power to prevent a shudder, which convulsed her whole frame, and to utter a most desperate shriek before she fainted.

Even a rabbit, when driven to desperation, forgets its timid nature and bites. Giacomo pushed the executioner away, and endeavoured to extricate the wedge, but did not succeed. The mild Lucretia and the child Bernardino also rushed towards Luciani as if they were going to tear him to pieces with their teeth. They screamed like maniacs, and looked like such. Although their rage was powerless, since an iron railing protected the judges, still Luciani became alarmed, and exclaimed, "Take care they do not get loose; they are Cenci's, and are therefore murderers."

Maestro Alessandro had taken advantage of the general confusion, and had extracted the wedge.

The judges were agitated for different reasons, so Luciani

gave orders to take all the prisoners back to their respective cells, and suspended the sitting.

Beatrice was carried back on a chair, and the physician declared that she could not safely be submitted to the question for another week at least.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INGRATITUDE.

ON the following day Luciani went to make his report to Cardinal St. Giorgio. He was immediately admitted by the chamberlain. The cardinal asked him, with assumed indifference of manner, "Well, where are we now? Is this strange affair finished at last?"

"Your Eminence beholds in me another Sisyphus."

By this simile the cardinal perceived at once the real state of the case, and, changing his assumed tone, asked abruptly, "What is the meaning of all this? Speak out."

"Eminence, we have not been able to induce the girl to confess anything; and what is worse still, the other prisoners, inspired by her example, have retracted their confessions"

"Signor President, I strongly suspect that you have become soft-hearted like Moscati."

"I soft-hearted!" exclaimed Luciani, as if he had heard something insultingly preposterous. "I assure your Eminence that I know my duty. Tortura capillorum, vigiliarum, cœnubiorum, rudentium, and taxillorum—everything was tried in succession, so that I was myself at my

wits' end. Had I gone on a little longer she must have expired. I compelled her to remain for three hours *in deliquio*."

"Not confess with the taxillo?" asked his Eminence.
"Are the taxilli made of butter, then?"

"We make them of pine and pitch. And the effect was such that Maestro Alessandro himself recommended us to suspend the torture, as there was great danger to life."

"But when you saw that rigour was not of any use, why did you not try gentler means?"

"Eminence, I track the game in the forest and in the river. I even went so far as to promise them their lives. Of course I gave only my own promise, which your Eminence or his Holiness need not have confirmed. I produced the whole family in court while she was *in extremis*, having previously persuaded them to induce her to confess, giving them to understand that by so doing they would all be saved. It was breath thrown away. The girl is wonderfully headstrong, scorning gentle persuasions as indignantly as torments; and while suffering all that human nature could endure, she exhorted the others to follow her example and retract their former confessions. They all did so, to my utter confusion."

"No," said the cardinal; "nobody shall persuade me that the proper measures were employed in this matter, according to the merits of the case and to my recommendation."

"Your Eminence does not render me justice. I went so far as to have her carefully examined on purpose to discover, if possible, the spot through which the demon had entered her body, in case she should be bewitched, and by so doing I followed the most competent authorities."

The cardinal shrugged his shoulders to express his contempt, and asked him what he proposed to do next.

"I have come on purpose to hear your Eminence's opinion."

An angry look from the cardinal indicated that he hated his despicable satellite already, and once the deed of blood over, he would hate him doubly, and shake off the importunate accomplice altogether; while Luciani in his turn will hate the cardinal, because he will find him as proud and overbearing as he knows him to be iniquitous.

The chamberlain announced Signor Prospero Farinaccio.

"Farinaccio!" exclaimed the cardinal. "Show him in, and do you, Signor Luciani, be pleased to wait in the ante-room for my orders."

The blow fell heavily on the newly appointed president. He will have to wait in the ante-room until the audience is over. Accustomed to treat his equals with arrogance, and his inferiors with supercilious contumely, what will the chamberlain think of him now? He a president, and Farinaccio a mere advocate!

"Is this the man, then, for whom I place my soul in jeopardy?"

Luciani did not place it in jeopardy for the cardinal, but

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mention to your Eminence by how many favours I am bound to the holy father and to yourself; how I have always endeavoured, according to my humble power, to exalt and to honour your noble house. I only mention this to convince your Eminence that better counsel may be found, but not more devotion and gratitude. It is, therefore, my duty to inform you that there has been a rumour current about Rome for some time, a rumour spreading more and more every day, viz., that it is impossible that the boy Bernardino could be an accomplice in the parricide, nor the young girl, for whom everybody seems to feel compassion on account of her extraordinary beauty, and also because report says that she underwent the most horrible tortures like a heroine. Calumny whispers about from ear to ear, that the whole family of Cenci are to be dragged into the same accusation, and then sacrificed by the same verdict, because the immense wealth of that great house is coveted. Amongst the nobility it creates manifest irritation and discontent to see so ancient a name threatened with entire destruction. Now I think, and many others think so likewise, that if it were but to refute these calumnies, we must concede an open field to the defence, for the audacity of the calumniators goes so far as to say, 'How can a young lamb protect itself against the old foxes of the forum? how an inexperienced child when terrified by threats, and entrapped by legal technicalities?'"

The cardinal's heart swelled within him. Skilled in self-control and dissimulation, he at first affected to smile

at the lawyer's intimations, but presently exclaimed, "How dare you suspect such horrors?"

"It is not I, your Eminence, who suspects. I know it to be a calumny; but it does not even stop short there, but it argues that the confessions extorted by agony are of no weight, and that it would have been more merciful to have had them despatched through a trap in the dark."

The cardinal bit his lip. Farinaccio, who was a very astute reasoner, knew that, having struck the heaviest blow, it was wise to soothe it, so he added, "I suffer to hear your Eminence's reputation thus mangled, and I should not have presented myself here, had I not known the particulars of the crime, and been in the hope of obtaining myself the whole confession from the prisoners; thus to make the calumniators blush, and, at the same time, to present once more to the holy father the opportunity of exercising that benignant mercy so pleasing to himself, and so much admired by the world."

"I apprehend that you would undertake too arduous a task, Signor Farinaccio, for these criminals have shown as much obstinacy as wickedness. Know that the doors of mercy may be thrown open to the humble prayer of the penitent, but not to the proud knock of the stubborn sinner. The proofs in this case are clear and irrefragable. As for the calumnies, we are not in the habit of paying much attention to the clamours of the populace. The eagle fears not the viper. We have certain useful instruments in our power that will shorten their tongues."

“The very language I used myself the other day in the courts; and I added, ‘You little know what bounty the cardinal harbours in his inmost heart, and what zeal spurs him on for the dignity and decorum of his name, and the fame of the Holy See.’”

The flattering language and modest reserve of Farinaccio sounded strangely to the prelate. He could not distinguish the hidden motive. Accustomed to mistrust even the candid, he could not unriddle the mystery. He neither agreed with nor did he repulse him, but took time to consider Farinaccio’s request, making use of the convenient pretext of referring the matter to his Holiness. Taking leave of each other, they were both pleased—Farinaccio because he was in hopes of being allowed to speak to the prisoners, to advise and to defend them; the cardinal because he thought that, through Farinaccio’s exertions, a confession was to be obtained which would silence suspicions—suspicions felt by him to be too well founded.

Farinaccio was born of humble parents in easy circumstances, who gave him a liberal education, and sent him to the university of Padua to study the law. On his return to Rome he soon became celebrated, and occupied the first place in the Curia Romana, partly from his erudition, and partly from his extraordinary activity and perseverance, through which he often obtained success in causes that others had given up in despair, gaining thereby great fame amongst the judges. His constitution contributed in no small degree to his success, although his life was dissolute

and his habits loose. After passing whole nights in gambling and dissipation, he would often show the greatest activity and intelligence in court on the following mornings.

Clement VIII., who had himself studied the law at Rome, Bologna, and Salamanca, held him in great estimation.

On a certain morning towards the end of August a man, in the attire of a carbonaro, presented himself at Farinaccio's studio, and was admitted into his presence after some delay, caused by the negligence of his clerks.

"Sit down, my man," said Farinaccio, "and please to inform me about your business."

"Do you know the Cenci family?" asked the visitor; "and does not an inward voice whisper to you to come forward on behalf of these unfortunates?"

"I know them, of course," answered the lawyer; "all Rome is in an uproar about them. The secrecy of the proceedings; the substitution of Luciani for Moscati, the latter a man of piety and integrity; the age of some of the prisoners, and the innocence of the child, besides many other circumstances which I must not mention, struck my mind, and made me suspect the existence of some dreadful conspiracy."

"In that case allow me to ask," said the carbonaro, "why you, who assist even the guilty and the infamous, have not raised your powerful voice in favour of those victims?"

"Because I have considered the matter thoroughly,"

replied the lawyer. "I should break my spade by digging in that soil. And I apprehend secret persecutions; ay, powerful ones. I fear that it will not be a judgment, but an assassination; that justice is no longer armed with the sword of the law, but with the dagger of the bandit. It is rumoured about—I can hardly believe it—that because the Cenci's are immensely rich, and the nephews of the Pope are very poor, a pretext is sought to confiscate that vast property, and means will be found to transfer it to those famished wolves."

"What!" exclaimed the man, "through the assassination of four innocent creatures? Are not you, then, the fiscal defender of widows and orphans? and is it not the glory of your profession to defend the innocent?"

"Tell me first. Pray, who are you?" asked the astonished Farinaccio.

"Alas! I am the most miserable man in the wide world. Allow me to keep my secret—it will be of little use to you to know it."

There was so much wretchedness in his expressions, and so much humility in his prayer, that Farinaccio considered it ungenerous to insist, and said,—

"I entertain no doubt of your discretion, and still less of your honour; I respect your disguise, and will open my mind to you. I consider the rumours and suspicions well founded, and, believing them firmly as I do, I should only draw upon myself a load of danger, because I must tell you, *in primis*, that the defence of parricides does not belong

to us *de jure*, but is only granted as a favour; and, secondly, you must tell me a little yourself how you would prove their innocence."

"I certainly because Francesco Cenci fell by my hands."

"By yours? Who are you, then?"

"You have had the courtesy to allow me to remain unknown I, Guido Guerra, killed him, and I would kill him again, because he was on the point of outraging nature. I will relate to you the whole occurrence, all the family secrets, the acts, the words, and the life of the monstrous father, and also the wonderful virtue and constancy of the unfortunate daughter."

"Monsignor Guido Guerra, if I told you to go and denounce yourself would you do it?"

"I will do it at once. I will do anything to save them."

"Stay. You would only add another victim, without liberating the prey from the devourers. The Pope will place the crown of a martyr on their heads to seize their wealth."

"Farinaccio, for God's sake do not abandon them! I know men at court who will assist you. Both Cardinal Sforza and my relative, Cardinal Barberini"

"Yes? Well, that is something," exclaimed Farinaccio, meditating deeply; but, as he still hesitated, Guerra fell on his knees imploringly, and informed him that the cardinals, his friends and relatives, were favourably disposed, and ex-

pected his visit. "My wretchedness," he added, "my misery must move you. You know all, and you cannot let them perish ; you cannot let me depart from you in despair."

"*Alea jacta est*," said Farinaccio, holding out his hand, which Guerra seized convulsively. "I will not conceal it from you, I pass the Rubicon with more apprehensions than I ever felt before in my life. May the Lord protect us ! But I fear sadly that the fish will drag the angler into the whirlpool. Still it is not that which influences me most. I fear adopting a course from which ruin may result, and which may bring desolation on that wretched family. But I will go to work with ardour and resolution, Monsignore. I may shudder at the bitter beverage, but I will seize the goblet, and drink its contents bravely. You may retire now, and rest assured that whatever my brain can imagine, and my mouth can say, will be set to work in favour of your appeal."

"I expected no less of you, Signor Farinaccio, and before I employ desperate measures I will wait and hope. Meanwhile, you will see her—you will see my Beatrice ! Do not speak of me, or rather do. Present this ring to her—it will inspire her with confidence in you. Alas, alas ! the blood of her father is between her and me ; but I have shed it for her. I love her dearly, and she cannot but love me ; but our love is a upas plant that exhales death."

Guido deposited a heavy purse on the table, and said to Farinaccio, who refused it, "I do not pretend to reward you either with this sum or any other ; but I profess myself

devoted to you for life, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your refusal would afflict me, and you know that I have afflictions enough already."

Farinaccio's resolution to refuse the money melted away like snow in the sun, as he thought of a sum that he had to pay to a usurer, to whom he was in the habit of applying the line of *Martial* :—

" *Nec tecum possum vivere, nec sine te.*"

When alone, after long and deep meditation, he imagined that he had found a way of saving that unfortunate family. The mode appeared fraught with danger, but the only one practicable according to his reasoning.

Farinaccio's most serious fault consisted in his quick conceptions. He looked upon them as profound, and acted in consequence. They were generally right ; but if wrong there was no possible remedy. The creature of impulse, his sudden decisions and rapidity of action left him no road to retreat. Prompt and faithful to his word, he made at once for the palaces of Sforza and Barberini. Both cardinals were ready to give him every assistance, and even waited for him, in a carriage that had no armorial bearings, in the neighbourhood, while he had the interview with the Pope's nephew already described.

Luciani had been waiting, meanwhile, in the ante-room for a considerable time, when a lackey informed him that his Eminence gave him leave to retire, ordering him in his name to suspend all further proceedings for the present,

and ushering, at the same time, the Cardinals Sforza and Barberini into the presence of his master with much obsequiousness. They commenced their conversation about the news of the day and the weather, and after a time mechanically alluded to the strange rumours about the Cenci's, thus striking a blow on the nail previously implanted by Farinaccio. They magnified the rumours by inventions of their own, and expressed their great concern at the temerity of the people, suggesting the propriety of a solemn refutation, particularly as the holy Catholic faith was in so great danger, both in France and Italy, from the number of heretics, who would certainly take advantage of such scandals. They completely succeeded in their plans, and obtained the promise of a public trial.

When St. Giorgio consulted with the Pope and his cousin Aldobrandino, they authorised him to inform Farinaccio that his request was granted.

Farinaccio felt much pleased, and looked upon it as a fortunate augury, not dreaming that he was outgeneraled, in spite of all his acuteness, by the wily triumvirate.

He at once solicited and obtained the assistance of his colleagues, De Angelis and Altieri, a matter of no small difficulty but of great importance, on account of their erudition and experience in criminal matters, and also because De Angelis was a very popular man at Rome, and because Altieri belonged to a patrician family of great influence with the nobility.

Early in the morning Farinaccio presented himself at the

prison of Corte Savelli, having previously obtained an order for admission from Monsignor Taverna, the Governor of Rome. The jailer escorted him immediately to the cells of Giacomo and Bernardino Cenci, and afterwards to that of Donna Lucretia.

Poor Beatrice was suffering very acute pains in her limbs, and still more from agony of mind. She thought of her lover. Fate had torn them asunder never to be united; her life had no longer any object; her existence had become irksome to her; alive or dead Guido could no longer extend his hand to her, not even to save her from a precipice, much less to become her husband. If it be the will of God it must be so.

The agonies which she suffered so innocently in this world will be recompensed in the next by heavenly bliss. "This life is over for me," she exclaimed. "So much the better; I am already an inhabitant of the tomb. But he, my Guido, will God forgive him? O yes, God will forgive him! He ever extends His forgiveness to the penitent. My poor Guido! do not say that you would do it again, because you loved me so dearly. Repent, Guido! My own Guido, repent! O God, save him! After my martyrdom on earth, let me behold him in heaven: there we may embrace and join hands. Hands did I say? O yes! for the blood will then be effaced from them and from my memory: God will have forgiven him. Still fearful doubts agitate my soul, and make me feel the bitterness of a second death. Had I but a holy man here to enlighten me, his

counsels would give more consolation to my troubled spirit than Luciani can give pain to my miserable body."

"Lady Beatrice," whispered Virginia, putting her head through the aperture for fear of disturbing her, "the Signor Farinaccio wishes to speak to you."

"Speak to me? What have I to do with that great lawyer? I do not know him; but you may let him come in."

Farinaccio entered her cell, but stopped short in astonishment. He had heard much of her beauty, but the reality surpassed all that his imagination had conceived.

"What is your wish?" she asked mildly, to which he replied,—

"Gentle lady, I present myself to you because your misfortunes call me, and because somebody entreated me to do so; one who sheds bitter tears for you; one whom you abhor and love at the same time; one, in short, who was never more worthy of you than he is at this moment, when he has lost you for ever. I see that your heart has already told you who sent me. Monsignor Guerra declares, in his despair, that he will die miserably unless you will endeavour to help yourself, and unless he succeeds in inducing you to place full confidence in me. He charged me to deliver this ring to you."

Beatrice took the ring, and asked the lawyer whether Guido had acquainted him with the whole case.

"He has told me everything."

"In that case what do you think, Signor Farinaccio?"

Does not my union with him resemble the wedding of the Doge of Venice with the sea, when he throws the ring into it and marries an abyss ? ”

Farinaccio's emotion made him silent for a short space. On recovering he said,—

“ Lady Beatrice, listen to me attentively ; the matter is of the utmost import. For your own escape, and that of your relatives, I can see no other remedy but the one I am going to suggest—one on which I have deeply meditated—one that the state of the criminal proceedings and the court requires, viz., that of confessing freely that you have killed your father ”

Beatrice interrupted him with a cry of surprise, and stared at him as if bewildered. That advice seemed so strange and preposterous to her, that she concluded that either her counsellor or herself must be affected with mental alienation.

Seeing her stupefaction, Farinaccio added, “ I can easily understand how strange my advice must appear until I have explained my motives in full.”

“ How can I,” said Beatrice, in an altered tone, “ how can I lacerate my own fair fame thus, and leave my name to be regarded by posterity with horror instead of compassion, after having undergone the most atrocious torments to save it from infamy ? ”

“ Dear Lady Beatrice, calm yourself, and allow me to inform you of something incredible. All Rome believes, that you have killed your unnatural father, but none

regard it as an outrage against nature. That rumour was circulated by those high in power, who covet your property. It was believed by the people because they feel for you, and because it flatters their imagination to look upon you as a wonderful heroine. They admire you as another Lucretia or Virginia of old. If anybody attempted to undeceive them, they would not only not believe him, but they would hate and maltreat him. If I undertook your defence by undeceiving them, I could not save you, and your denying the deed would convince no one. The judge maintains that the proofs resulting from the investigations are sufficient to condemn you. The law invests the tribunal with the power of submitting the accused to the torture until death ensues, when once the accomplices have made their confessions."

"Be it so," said Beatrice; "they have reduced me so far already that little more life remains. Death is not so very painful, after all, as mankind fancy; it will relieve me from my agonies."

"No, poor dear lady! you must not die thus. Recollect that such a resolution, although looked upon as magnanimous amongst the Gentiles, is very sinful in our Christian faith, because he that can, but will not save his own life offends our Deity as much as he that commits suicide."

"And do you recommend me to live, Signor Farinaccio, and see mankind stare at me, to discover the word parricide written on my brow?"

"You are much mistaken, my lady. The world would not hate you; on the contrary, they love and admire you, and will do so as long as mankind admires virtue and heroism. They believe, that you have killed your father to save yourself from being polluted by his incestuous desires. The closer the relationship the greater is the infamy, and the more sacred and legitimate the defence. Look through ancient and modern history, and see whether children have ever been considered infamous who killed their parents in similar desperate circumstances. Take the case of Orestes, and examine whether there is any difference between his offence and yours. He killed his mother many years after the murder of Agamemnon, not to protect himself from immediate and horrible danger, such as menaced you, but to avenge his honour; and still it is related that Minerva came down from heaven to throw the vote into the urn, which made the judges cut short all farther discussion, and proclaim him innocent."

"Tell me then, in conscience, Signor Farinaccio, would you have betrothed your daughter to Orestes after that vote of Minerva, or could you be induced to let your son marry a parricide?"

"My answer cannot satisfy your question, because your case is widely different. Justice is not the same at all times; it should be so, but it is not. A time will come when people will be astonished to hear, how a delicate girl of sixteen suffered and endured the most dreadful torments, to preserve her fame and the name of her family. I have

sought in vain for an example of so tremendous a sacrifice."

Farinaccio took the crucifix from the wall and exclaimed, "He will teach you better than any words of mine what a sacrifice is. He consented to an ignominious death for the redemption of those who offended Him, and who still persisted in their offence."

"Yes," replied Beatrice; "but our Lord did not die in infamy. I cannot imitate the Lord of truth by swearing to a falsehood."

"Consider, above all, my dearest lady, that it is an act against nature to compel the accused to take an oath at all, as he must either perjure himself or else he must swear his life away. Even divine laws permit us to defend our own lives by destroying our assailants, and are we not to use our faculties in its defence by the mere affirmation of something that is not true? For is not homicide worse than perjury? It certainly is so. But supposing them equally criminal, if we are allowed to protect our lives by the first, for what reason are we not to do so by the second?"

"Signor Farinaccio, you are a man of the law; I cannot argue with you. You confound, but you do not convince me. I feel it here, in my heart, that truth is with me," remonstrated the unfortunate girl, and sank back exhausted on her pillow.

At that moment the prison door opened, and her mother and brothers entered her cell. They surrounded her bed without saying a word, but their sorrowful countenance expressed their inward sufferings.

After a long silence, during which Beatrice only took her eyes off the crucifix to smile at times on her beloved relatives, she suddenly exclaimed, in a mournful tone, "Since you all wish it, be it so. Thou, God! who seest and hearest these things, if sinful forgive me, for my intention is good; if right reward me according to my merit. Fate may be weary of persecuting us when it has inscribed on our tombstones, '*Here lie all the Cenci's, who were executed for their crimes.*' I will not deprive you, my own dear ones, of your last ray of hope. I will do it in spite of my reluctance, and in spite of my conviction. At any rate, I shall not be a useless victim. Would that my sufferings could be received as an expiation for all of you, or rather to satiate our bitter fate; but my sacrifice is fruitless. Of this I only remind you out of pity for the agony you will have to suffer when engulfed in the abyss of despair."

All wept bitterly. Farinaccio covered his face with both his hands, and bent his head on the bedstead, meditating a less perilous defence than that which had created such a repugnance in Beatrice; but, finding none, he groaned and retired with a heavy heart. On the stairs he met Luciani, and informed him that Beatrice would confess to the having killed her father in self-defence.

"Truly!" exclaimed the astonished president. "Why, you can operate miracles, Signor Farinaccio. You are a wonderful lawyer. If you will consent to remain at the bar we will burn all the instruments of torture, ordinary and extraordinary."

Farinaccio, who felt much shocked at this revolting display of exultation, replied reproachfully,—

“Signor President, when the Greeks obtained a victory over their brother Greeks, instead of exulting they were accustomed to celebrate public expiations.”

“Ah! you are a literary man. You walk in the higher regions, Signor Farinaccio; but I am satisfied with the ordinary road, and I know that our peasants present an egg to the sportsman who has destroyed a fox. I went straight to the point; there is no trifling with me. Her pretty little Ave Maria face did not deceive me. *Cara de angel, coraçon de demonio*, as the Spaniards say.”

Farinaccio seized Luciani by the arm, led him to the window, and pointing to the sun, then in meridian splendour, exclaimed, “Could you collect those rays, and make a crown of them, it would not be worthy of the virtue of that heavenly girl.”

Luciani did not look at the sun, but stared Farinaccio full in the face, and then shaking his head said, with much gravity, “My good friend, I look upon that little sorceress with eyes totally different from yours, and this for two reasons, one better than the other. The first is this” (here he uncovered his head), “my grey hair; and the second is this;” and he opened his waistcoat, and produced a little black bag containing charms against witchcraft.

Farinaccio in his turn looked him full in the face, and then left him in disgust.

Luciani, finding it impossible to make Beatrice appear

again before his tribunal, went himself to her prison, accompanied by two of his colleagues and Signor Ribaldella, the notary, who wrote down her confession. She charged herself with the deed, declaring, however, that there had been no premeditation on her part, and that she had been driven to it by her father's incestuous attempt. She stated the particulars as they had taken place, only substituting her own name for that of Guerra.

When Luciani asked her how she had obtained a dagger in her prison she hesitated, but said at last that she had carried one about her person for a long time, with the intention of killing herself rather than submit to infamy. Luciani was satisfied with her embarrassed explanation, and carried the precious document to his Eminence of St. Giorgio.

"We have it," said he exultingly; "we have the desired confession at last, *habemus pontificem*"

The cardinal, a man of no ordinary acuteness, looked over the papers, and discovered the contradictions and improbabilities of the depositions and the opposing evidence. He expressed his doubts whether it would not prove an easy task for the defence to demolish an edifice so loosely constructed; but Luciani replied, "That minute details cannot be attended to in a matter of this sort; that one thing only must not be lost sight of, viz., the confession of all the accused to have participated in the crime, either as principals or accessories; that it was not possible to make all contradictions agree in a suit of this nature, where all the guilty endeavour to escape the vengeance of the law.

Where the crime is so clear we must not sophisticate. It is confessed by all of them now—that is the main point, and no other formalities are required; nor can there be any counsel admitted, nor any defence granted.”

The cardinal required no encouragement. The sinister eloquence of Luciani flattered his evil passions, and he thought that the new president had never argued more logically.

The rumour of the confession spread through Rome like wildfire. Crowds collected in every street, and women listened from the balconies to every whisper. As the Israelites waited anxiously at the foot of Mount Sinai for Moses, so did the Romans look daily to the Vatican for the decision of the fate of the Cenci's. The original verdict was as follows :—

“Let them all be tied to the tail of a wild horse, dragged about until death follows, and then the bodies be thrown into the Tiber.” A verdict of blood, pronounced by the vicar of Christ!

All Rome was horror-struck. Many would not believe in a decree of such frightful barbarity; others, who had some knowledge of the court, declared the Pope to be capable of anything. Farinaccio heard of it in dismay, and agreed with the latter. He immediately went in search of Guido's friends, the Cardinals Sforza and Barberini, who, with others of the sacred college, came to the conclusion that the verdict was exceedingly severe. Both cardinals went to the Vatican to dissuade the Pope from so inconsiderate an

act; while Farinaccio presented himself at the palace of the cardinal nephew, where a lackey informed him that his Eminence had gone to visit the Spanish ambassador. He threw himself in a chair, and said that he would wait. Presently he rose up again, muttered something, looked very agitated, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "To be thus shamefully tricked!" he would exclaim from time to time almost aloud. Presently he was told to enter. The cardinal looked calm and composed, as if receiving some stranger; but Farinaccio, who was trembling with emotion, went boldly towards him, saying, "Is this, then, the sacerdotal faith?"

St. Giorgio interrupted him gravely, but with evident embarrassment: "Signor Farinaccio, I must inform you that the promise of a public defence was made by me *sub modo*; namely, on the supposition that the confession of the accused would not be so clear and so conclusive as to make the defence superfluous. I must tell you also that I honour those intellects which enlighten our path in the darkness of doubt and error, and keep us in the road of rectitude; but, on the other hand, I despise those lawyers who make improper use of their talents to distort plain facts by sophisms and cavils, embroiling what is simple and straightforward."

"Does your Eminence look upon the proofs of guilt as clear? Can you accept that part of the confession which admits the guilt, and reject the part that justifies it? thus insidiously"

“Signor Farinaccio, I shall not plead the cause with you. I only beg to observe that my promise was given *sub conditione*, and, therefore, subject to the sanction of the Pope: it could not be given otherwise. Your own perspicacity must point out to you that this condition is *per se*. The power of an inferior is always limited, and the fulfilment of his promise must necessarily depend on his superior, and that irrespectively of any express mention or stipulation. If, then, the holy father, the fountain of all wisdom, my sovereign and yours, does not approve of my engagements, I leave you to consider, as a reasonable man, what right you have to complain.”

“Eminence, I was born at Rome myself, and was bred at the curia, so you will easily understand that all such sophistry is thrown away upon me. You have made me a promise: if you had not the power to maintain that promise you should not have made it. All the world knows that you are the arbiter of the pontifical counsels, and that nothing is refused to you. I have obtained the confession on condition of a public defence being granted, and I trusted on certain arguments of mine. I now supplicate you to grant that defence, otherwise do you know what will be said? That four innocent beings were butchered on account of their wealth in the very capital of the Catholic world; and I am the man who will proclaim it.”

“Signor Farinaccio, your mind is much affected; pray be calm. Your over-excitement will do you some great injury.”

Farinaccio was in no mind to listen to prudent advice, nor to heed any direct menace ; or, if he felt it at all, it had the effect of spurs on the flanks of a spirited horse—his indignation boiled within him.

“How can I calm myself?” he continued. “The general corruption of the time had driven me into a dissolute life. I pursued it without shame, but also without infamy; but there is a bright pure spot in my inmost heart where the voice of God is heard. It commands me to divulge the innocence of the Cenci’s. Beatrice made false confessions at my instigation, on account of the prayers of her family, and from a noble impulse to save them. If you retract your promise I become her murderer—on my head will be the blood of those victims. No tears can ever wash off my remorse; and I swear by this holy book that, in expiation of my involuntary crime, I will undertake a pilgrimage from Estremadura to Palestine, and from Jerusalem to Loretto, to proclaim the misdeed in every town, village, and hamlet.”

“You take this matter too much to heart, Signor Farinaccio. You are aware of the high esteem entertained for you at court, and how anxious we are to gratify you whenever possible. I will tell you in confidence that his Holiness has not yet given orders to the Governor of Rome for the execution of the sentence. I will endeavour to speak to him at once, and I will supplicate on purpose to obtain the defence by reiterating that I have pledged my word. Meanwhile, rest assured of one

thing—not a leaf shall fall without your being previously informed thereof. I have something more to tell you before you go. It has been decided for some time past in court to promote you to a high office, an office worthy of you, partly on account of your talent, and partly because the state will benefit thereby; but you must not destroy your prospects by your own acts. I must also remind you that certain peccadillos of yours are only just forgotten, and that it would be unwise on your part to dig a pit out of which you would have some trouble ever to extricate yourself. I shall be glad to see you again shortly.”

The last words of the cardinal caused Farinaccio much pain and anxiety. Still he followed up his resolution by collecting his colleagues, informing them of the treachery of the court, and urging them to join him immediately in his resolution to speak to the Pope. They did not require much persuasion, as there always exists an *esprit de corps* amongst colleagues, and Altieri and De Angelis were known to have advocated all just causes with much alacrity. They were, indeed, naturally timid, and not much inclined to offer themselves as martyrs in a desperate cause; still they were not the men to abandon it through sheer cowardice.

On their arrival at the Vatican a rumour reached them that the Pope refused to see any one who came to speak to him about the Cenci's, so they resolved to depute De Angelis only, as he was the first barrister of Rome, and not known to the Pope to be one who had consented to

take part in the defence. Hoping to obtain an audience through his intercession, they presented themselves separately in the ante-room, disguising thus that the same business had brought them there. The plan succeeded. When De Angelis was admitted Farinaccio and Altieri entered along with him the moment the doors were thrown open. Before the Pope recovered from his surprise all three knelt before him. He addressed them angrily,—

“How is this? What do you ask of me, gentlemen?”

“Father, we will not rise from your holy feet until the defence promised by his Eminence St. Giorgio in the Cenci cause is granted to us and confirmed by your Holiness.”

Clement VIII., with difficulty dissembling his anger, replied, “Has Providence, then, reserved for us to witness, that at Rome there are not only miscreants who kill their own parents, but that there are eminent men of the law who will not shrink from taking the defence of parricides?”

De Angelis looked terrified, and Altieri, considering these words strange and ominous, was going to reply, when Farinaccio boldly anticipated him, saying,—

“Most holy father, it is somewhat novel to hear the bar, the pride and the light of Rome, thus stigmatised as the champion of crime. We came not hither to defend parricides, but to supplicate for the maintenance of a sacred promise, because we can prove, by our defence, the innocence of the accused; that they are worthy of pardon, and fitting objects of the apostolic mercy. You, most holy

father, look upon them as guilty, and we humbly bow to your conviction. We ourselves look upon them as innocent, and we crave the right to have our convictions respected. The voice of conscience is a divine inspiration, and in the balance of our Eternal Father all consciences are of equal weight."

The last words were uttered with great solemnity; they sounded as if they had proceeded from the chair of the apostle of Christ, and not from the man at his feet.

The Pope looked stern and suspicious as he asked, "Are you the lawyer Prospero Farinaccio, and has his Eminence St. Giorgio promised you the favour of defending the Cenci criminals?"

"I am an unworthy son and a humble subject of your Holiness," replied Farinaccio. "The cardinal has made me this promise most distinctly."

"The cardinal shall keep his word. Go in peace, gentlemen."

There was a tone of menace in the voice of the Pope.

Altieri, fearful of having lost favour, left his colleagues in the ante-room, and, turning back again, threw himself at the apostolic feet, exclaiming, "Most holy father, deign to consider that, in my capacity of fiscal barrister, I could in no way refuse to join my colleagues."

Clement VIII. had, by this time, recovered his self-possession, and mildly replied, "We were not astonished at you, but at the others. Still they are worthy men, and zealous in their noble profession."

Altieri thanked him devoutly and rejoined his colleagues, who were in close conference with Cardinal St. Giorgio. The latter in his turn entered the papal chamber, where he remained just long enough to save appearances, and then returned radiant with smiles and affected gaiety. "Gentlemen, I have obtained everything," said he; "all is confirmed. A respite of twenty-five days is granted for preparing the defence."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE JUDGMENT.

"As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people."—PROVERBS.

PREPARATIONS for the trial were made in a hall of the Vatican. There the prelates were accustomed to deliberate, and there the destinies of temporal sovereigns had often been discussed and decided—the very hall in which the stranger at the present day contemplates the transcendent conceptions of the divine Raphael.

There sat the Pope on an elevated throne, under a canopy of crimson velvet fringed with gold. Four cardinals were seated a little below, Cinzio Passero of St. Giorgio, Francesco Sforza of St. Gregory, Pietro Aldobrandini, and the Cardinal of St. Nicolas, all attired in their gorgeous purple robes. Still lower, and within the vast circuit, were seated bishops and other prelates, all conspicuous in their crimson and purple cloaks. In the centre, on the right of the throne, was a bench covered with black cloth for the auditors of the palace of the sacred criminal court, headed by their president. On the opposite side was a similar

bench for the fiscal procurators and the notaries; then came the bench destined for the defence. The whole circle was guarded by a troop of grim-looking lancers, mercenary soldiers from the north, whose duty it was to keep back the people, and many an angry word and brutal act fell to the lot of those who thronged too close. There were also many ladies and cavaliers, all dressed sumptuously, as if for some splendid festival.

The usher commanded silence, and the president, after having obtained permission from the Pope, intimated to the fiscal procurator that he might commence.

That functionary rose accordingly, adjusted his hair, and wiped his face with a cambric kerchief. Petulance, presumption, and stupidity were his portion in childhood, to which he added hypocrisy in manhood. After having assured the court that he had carefully examined the case, and after having called on Him for His guidance who is never slow in granting it to the sincere supplicant, he stated how certain persons, not enemies or strangers, but relatives, wife and children, instigated by the fiend, had conspired to destroy the Count Francesco Cenci, a man of pious disposition, of high lineage, and of profound erudition.

He spoke of the instructions given to Marzio and Olympio, of the drugged beverage, and of the postponement of the deed on account of the feast of the Madonna. He then described the reluctance of the assassins, and the atrocious instigation of the girl Beatrice;

of the nail struck in the eye with a hammer; of the body dragged by the hair along the pavement, and the brutal act of throwing it out from the balcony. He dwelt much on the proofs resulting from the tortures, and the confessions of all the culprits; and, finally, stated how the world at large seemed petrified with horror at such a deed, perpetrated in the very seat of the holy religion, at the very threshold of the throne of the best of the vicars of our Lord. He narrated also how the sun had been eclipsed in consequence, and how the Tiber had run backwards to its source.

The fact was that the sun never shone more clearly in Rome, and the Tiber ran as usual towards Ostia.

Respecting the tender years of two of the culprits he remarked that, if they were capable of such abominations before reaching the age of puberty (no new argument in Rome), what might not be apprehended from them if they were allowed to become adults? He concluded by protesting that the soul of that illustrious man, having been thus violently sent out of the world without the consolation of religion, had returned from the penal fires of purgatory to demand of the judges of this world vengeance! vengeance!

The first counsel for the defence was Altieri, who rose to speak in behalf of Donna Lucretia. He congratulated himself in not being obliged to have recourse to miracles. He only called the attention of the court to the pure character and the blameless life of the pious Donna Lucretia

Petroni. He would not offend the court with an appeal to vengeance, a word reprobated at all times, and not to be tolerated in the presence of the vicar of Christ, or in any Christian tribunal, which should only listen to the invocation of justice, and not of vengeance. He then searched for the causes and motives of that crime, and proved that none could be applicable to her. It could not have been covetousness; she had nothing to expect from the death of her husband, since every one knew and knows that the Count had disinherited all his relations. It could not have been vengeance, as she had shown the most exemplary patience while suffering the vilest affronts and indignities at the hand of her infamous husband. Such being the case when she was young and handsome, it was not at all likely that she would have shown less endurance at a more advanced age, when the blood circulates more slowly in the veins, and when the impulses of our nature are less violent. Donna Lucretia, moreover, might have had recourse to the tribunal and obtained a divorce. Her rich dowry and wealthy relatives would have amply secured her against want or poverty. Much less must we put any faith in the instigations of the demon, as our holy religion tells us that pious souls are exempt from them; and where is there to be found a more devout woman than Donna Lucretia? The very accusation itself proves her piety when it alleges, that she had the deed postponed on account of the feast day of the Madonna. He maintained that a woman thus influenced by religious zeal could not commit such a crime

either on a feast or on any other day. He went on examining act after act in the indictment, and after pointing out the irregularities, the contradictions, and the weak points of the proofs, concluded by supplicating the judges not to allow a lady so universally esteemed, so benevolent and charitable to the poor, and of so pure a life, to be precipitated to her grave down the road of infamy.

De Angelis was the second counsel who spoke. He undertook the defence of Don Giacomo, showing that the *causa di delinquere* was inapplicable to his client also. He proved him to be a man of quiet domestic habits, and of a life exempt from the vices and corruptions of the age; an exemplary father and a good husband, not at all likely to become all at once of so ferocious a disposition. Nature does not admit such sudden changes, and everything opposed to the eternal laws of nature must be rejected at once, or admitted only with great precaution.

“Don Giacomo was not even at the Rocca when the crime was committed; he was at Rome at the time. Is it not clear, then, that he could not have participated in person? Let us see, now, whether he did so by letters or messages. Where are they? Why not produce them? Why not even allude to them? The *onus probandi* rests with the accusation.

“As for the confession, that offspring of the racks, I deny that such confessions can be of any weight in the balance of justice; it is immoral, unworthy of our age and religion, and against nature.

"How can we compel a man to swear his life away? The man who destroys himself has always been considered as having lost his senses. The holy church grants him burial *in sacris*, precisely because it holds him to have been out of his mind; ergo, to accuse ourselves of a crime for which we suffer death is tantamount to suicide. The tongue kills as well or better than the hand.

"I may be told that it was not a spontaneous confession, but one extorted by the power of torments. Eternal God! is this an answer?

"A time will come when posterity will marvel how we, their forefathers, have been so besotted or so barbarous as to accept as an argument of truth what by its very nature is but a manifest sign of error and ferocity."

A murmur of disapprobation ran through the whole court. Farinaccio pulled his colleague by the sleeve and admonished him, *sotto voce*, not to dilate on so delicate a question.

Cardinal Baronio, a very learned man for his time, whispered something to Cardinal Aldobrandini, who in his turn looked much scandalised and said, "Those blessed lawyers, when once they get under weigh, sail to the world's end—and a little beyond it. How are we ever to get at a truth except through tortures?" To which the other replied,—

"See what good we get by granting the privilege of speech to all those chatterboxes! The wisdom of the wisest doctors is outraged by their unparalleled impudence. What

will become of authority? I wonder the judges do not impose silence."

"Eminence," observed Aldobrandini, smiling, "let us allow them to talk as long as we can act. When they come to close quarters *on aviserà*, as the kings of France say when their parliament refuses to adopt an edict."

De Angelis tacked round, and proceeded to demolish the edifice of false reasonings and erroneous conclusions of the fiscal procurator. He dwelt upon the ancient lineage of the Cenci's, and was pathetic in describing the desolate position of Don Giacomo's children. "Judges must be cautious," he said, "very cautious of imprinting the stamp of infamy on such a noble house. They must reflect that no family will connect itself with the children of the parricide—no house open its portals to them. They become objects of disgust upon the earth, and, though innocent, everybody recoils from them with horror.

"Holy father of the faithful! I submit to you the misery of the wife and the wretchedness of the children. A desolate mother and four innocent babes lift their hands to your holy throne. Deign to listen to their cries, for after God they trust in you alone."

"Eminence," said Cardinal Sforza to Cardinal St. Giorgio, "here is your kerchief; you must want it to dry up your tears."

"I am not much given to tears," he replied; "but the speech was conclusive, and the peroration rather good."

"That is according to taste, Eminence. If we compare

it with Aristotle or Quintilian we shall find it little better than the rhetoric of a schoolboy; besides, it is perfect heresy not to admit the value of a confession obtained by torture. But mark! Farinaccio is rising. Let us see how his mettle will distance his predecessors."

Farinaccio, shaking his head ominously, and casting a disdainful glance at the fiscal procurator, began thus: "May the Lord help us! for really I know not whether I am more overwhelmed by astonishment or affliction. Before I commence the defence I am compelled to recall the accusations to your minds. It is the duty of the fiscal procurator to proceed with due severity, but not with rancour; he should be zealous, but not acrimonious; acute, but not perfidious. When acting otherwise I will tell him, to his confusion, that he ceases to be an advocate, and usurps the part of the executioner. How can I recognise the magistrate, the conscientious defender of the law, when he maliciously alters and confounds arguments with sophistries? And, what is still worse, how am I to recognise his noble calling when I hear him distorting facts, disfiguring realities, and inventing falsehoods? Do not writhe in your chair, Signor Procurator; what I advance I intend to prove. First of all, you have dared to describe Count Francesco Cenci as a model of piety and virtue. You quoted Greek and Latin classics on purpose to collect jewels for the crown of merit which you place on the head of your hero. *Proh pudor!* Francesco Cenci a religious man? He put up holy images on purpose to vilify them!

he restored temples on purpose to profane them ! he had graves dug to bury all his children, and expressed a wish daily to see them laid in their narrow cells ! Was it piety that made him invite his friends to a feast on the very day when he had received the news of the murder of his two sons at Salamanca ? Was it pious to hold up a glass of red wine, and drink to the death of his other children ? Are these monstrosities invented by me ? No, signori, they are in everybody's mouth ; they are testified by prelates and barons, by men of honour and faith, who were guests at that horrible feast. You all knew the man ; you know with how many iniquities he stood charged. Some of you have condemned him for crimes, and what sort of crimes ! The holy man had to undergo many accusations ; ay, and a good many condemnations likewise—condemnations which he compromised by paying large sums of money to the apostolic ærarium. What are the works which this sainted man has left to posterity ? Follow me to his studio, gentlemen, and I will show you his ephemeris, where, with infamous audacity, he registered day after day the various crimes which he committed, and the sums they cost him. He analysed the sentiments of the heart, which nature gives us to relieve our earthly pilgrimage, purposely to betray them. He feigned love that he might seduce innocence, and then abandon it to despair. He became a husband purposely to become an adulterer ; a father to commit incest. He studied human laws to discover a way to transgress, and divine laws to commit sacrilege. Had

not Francesco Cenci lived we might have believed that Suetonius had exaggerated the infamies of Tiberius. But Cenci has proved to the world that all the abominations of Caligula, Nero, Domitian, and Caracalla can be surpassed. Such was Francesco Cenci! If I have calumniated his memory may his soul appear before this tribunal, and point me out as a calumniator! Oh, wretched spirit, hear me, wherever thou art! But I will leave it to the recording angel to accuse him before his Creator, while I confine myself to accuse him before the Lord's holy vicar of having been the most infamous of human beings." (Here Cardinal St. Giorgio whispered to Aldobrandini, "That man must be ours.") "Look at the corpse," proceeded Farinaccio; "there is a mortal wound in the neck. Who has inflicted it? His daughter. She declares it herself without trembling; she confesses it without remorse; she even declares that if she had not done it she would do it again. Look at that girl who has made this atrocious deposition. Who is she? A mere child, whose face seems to have been moulded by angels, on purpose that we poor mortals might possess a type of celestial purity on earth. Innocence may kiss her on the lips and say, *Ave, sister!* It speaks as she speaks, and smiles as she smiles. Whoever has seen her, talks of her with admiration. Now, what could have urged that angelic being to so execrable a deed? Ask the fiscal procurator, and he will inform you, '*It was the fiend.*' The fiend, indeed! Had the fiend ever seen her he would have taken

her for an angel, and have worshipped her. The fiscal procurator himself would certainly not run such a risk—nobody mistakes him for an angel. But let us leave the fiend to his calling, and discuss more natural matters. What drove her to commit this foul deed? Avarice? At her age a gentle girl thinks of wealth about as much as a nightingale. At fifteen or sixteen a girl loves the heaven and the creation. But let us suppose, for argument's sake, that it was lust for wealth: how could that lead her to such a horrid act? The very large fortune settled upon her by her mother, her father could not take from her, nor could he in any way deprive her of it, or interfere with it. As for his own wealth she knew, as everybody knew, that her father had deprived his children of all long ago, and that he would have deprived them of their lives could he have done so without compromising the safety of his own. Remember that the fortune of her house was an enfeoffment, which, according to our laws, never can be taken from the legitimate successors on any pretext, not even for felony, high treason, or parricide."

The old Pope lowered his head at the last significant words, and looked much irritated, when he whispered to St. Giorgio, "That man must be with us."

"Fortunate Olympia!" resumed Farinaccio, after a pause, "your supplication met the benevolent ears of his Holiness, and you were protected from the infamous designs of your father. Heaven did not grant a similar mercy to Beatrice. In the bustle of business, amidst the exultation of victory,

and the conquest of Ferrara, her feeble voice was lost—not even a trace is found in the archives of the memorial which the miserable girl addressed to the holy father. The only thing we found in the registers is the date of its presentation—a fatality that deprived her of that powerful aid which had rescued her sister. It was indeed a fatality. The poor child was thus abandoned, like Andromeda, to be devoured by the monster. I feel very great repugnance to enter into the atrocities practised by Count Cenci against his daughter Beatrice. Nature has not provided me with such a heart or such talent as she seems to have bestowed on the fiscal procurator. I cannot dwell upon the execrable words by which the infamous old man endeavoured to contaminate the chaste ears of that unfortunate child, nor will I horrify you by narrating how he laboured to vitiate the purity of her mind. No flattery, no depravity, no wrath, no threat, and not even imprisonment, blows, and starvation, had any effect upon her. We see a corpse—the throat is cut—we are horrified. It is the body of an old man—of a father killed by his own daughter. Nobody denies that; she herself admits it. Let us investigate what that man was about when he was sent thus suddenly before his Creator. Like a nocturnal robber he opens the door stealthily; he finds his desolate child asleep in her prison; a loose and ample cloak is his only garment; he slowly approaches her couch—pulls down the bedclothes. Whoever amongst you, gentlemen, is a father, let him follow me; let him look at the wretch touching the body of the maiden, and he will

be horrified and thunderstruck with me. Beatrice awakes. What will she do? What, we ask? Had she been abject and impious like her father, you would then have seen how the sun would have been eclipsed, and how the Tiber would have rolled backwards towards its source. I have been compelled to make this bold but brief sketch of that frightful attempt, that I might ask you, signori, whether you would have wished Beatrice to be impious and abject, or miserable and desolate as she is at present? There was no escape and no medium—she was in the monster's power, she seized a dagger in horror and despair, and delivered herself from infamy. We cannot help deploring so frightful an alternative, but we cannot help admiring the heroic Roman girl, to whom the honour of a triumph would have been decreed by our ancestors, while modern and Christian Rome tears her to pieces with tortures, and threatens her with an ignominious death! I will not presume to point out to you the enormity of the crime of incest; it would be offering an insult to your judgment. I will leave to the procurator his miracles of the sun and the Tiber. I will only point out to you, that all ancient laws distinctly absolve those who commit homicide to save themselves from rape. By the law '*Isti quidem, quod metus causa,*' we find this immunity granted if homicide is committed from fear of rape, because it strikes more terror than death itself, as it is emphatically expressed in that statute. There is no lack of examples: Valerius Maximus and Caius

Marius. Virginius, again, was declared innocent, because he only slew his daughter to save her from the lust of Appius. Extreme despair has driven Beatrice to a similar act, and she is equally guiltless. It were insanity to maintain that she ought to have complained. Did the monster give her time or opportunity? I have stated to you already that the unfortunate girl had a memorial presented to his Holiness; that she prayed on her knees to all the guests at the banquet on that memorable night when they witnessed the Count's ferocity at his own table; but alas! it was all in vain. She was imprisoned immediately after, and could not make her voice heard through the prison walls. I almost repent of having appealed to mercy, not because I do not consider it proper in all cases to have recourse to the benevolent feeling of mankind, but because it strikes me that the case does not require it. When we shall be in our graves, and when even our bones cannot be found, then the name of Beatrice Cenci will make the hearts of posterity palpitate—she will immortalise our century. It remains with you, signori, to stamp that century with justice or with infamy. Had I the authority of Scipio, I should follow his example and proclaim, 'In such a month, on such a day, a Roman virgin conquered the weakness of her sex, and courageously defended her virtue.' Instead of discussing her innocence, we should have had to proceed to the temple to thank the gods for having reserved so admirable a being for our own time. I had almost for-

gotten the boy Bernardino, because the accusation against him is not worthy of a defence. What! is it not an imputation on our intellect to suppose a child eleven years old to be the accomplice of a parricide? Either the assertion of the procurator is admitted, or the confession of Beatrice is believed; in either case the accusation is absurd. If Beatrice, in the desperation of self-defence, has really killed the infamous man, then she did not require either advice or accomplices. If, on the other hand, as the fiscal procurator pretends, Sicari were employed to murder the Count, how can we drag Bernardino into the conspiracy? For advice perhaps? Verily, children of eleven are but poor counsellors in matters of parricide. A being who could sit in consultation and give advice in so enormous a misdeed at eleven years of age, might make Satan tremble on his seat for fear of losing his throne in pandemonium. But perhaps they wanted Bernardino's assistance, and not his advice? I ask you, in the name of common sense, what could be the value of that assistance to two strong brigands of the Abruzzi? Signori, I will not offer any insult to your judgment by dilating any longer on that boy; the whole accusation against him belongs to that species of monstrous delusions that are at times apt to pervert human intellect."

Partly from the boldness of his words and attitude, and partly from his metaphors, which show the taste of his time, his peroration produced a deep and profound murmur throughout the assembly; but the presence of

the Pope, and still more the fear of the foreign mercenaries, prevented an uproar of applause. The judges retired to deliberate.

After a long interval a rumour of unknown origin was circulated, that the verdict would not be known before evening.

Everybody retired in hopes and prayers that the Madonna might inspire the judges with mercy.

Farinaccio, intoxicated with the praises of his eloquence, and confident of the result, retired also, to spend, according to his habits, the remainder of the day and night in low carouse.

On his return home late a lackey presented him with a despatch sealed with the Pope's arms. At that moment the fate of his client had been decided. He opened it with trembling hands, feeling certain of finding the acquittal. He was mistaken. It contained a brevet, promoting him to a counsel of the sacred Roman Rota, with all the prerogatives, honours, and stipends annexed to that charge.

"This is not what I expected; but it promises well," he said. "Had his Holiness been angry, he would not have promoted me on account of that defence."

He retired with that illusion, and slept the sleep of the happy.

At nine o'clock in the evening the judges are again assembled in the same hall. One candelabrum only is burning in the centre of the table, covered with a dark

shade. The judges are seated, and are exchanging low whispers among themselves. All had been deeply impressed with the solemnity of the case and the powerful language of Farinaccio. The president often glances at a paper that he had not before perceived, but which might still have had something to do with the cause. He opens it, reads it, and suddenly turns pale and livid; his hands tremble while he passes it to his nearest colleague, who in turn hands it to his neighbour—it makes the circuit of the table, and is again left in its original place.

The agitation of the president has communicated itself to the judges like an electric spark; they looked down-cast, and were absorbed in thought. An iron yoke seemed to hang round their necks. That document, like the head of Medusa, had converted their hearts into stone; for it contained the sentence which condemned the whole Cenci family to death: “Lucretia, Beatrice, and Bernardino to be beheaded; Giacomo to be hammered to death, and then quartered; the property to be confiscated in favour of the holy apostolic court.”

Long and appalling was the silence—you might have heard the candles flicker, and the sand-glass drop grain after grain. It was the silence of death.

“Are, then, my judges cowards?”

Who spoke? That sudden question has startled their very souls. Whence came it? No one was to be seen. The man who pronounced it avoids the light. In the

shade, at the farther end of the room, he moves his heavy limbs. They look in that direction. Who commands thus in Rome? It is the sceptred priest, the vicar of Christ, he who speaks with the angel of God face to face. Who else in Rome but he, would have dared to dictate death?

The president seized the pen, and shuddered as he dipped it in the ink. The ink looked like blood; he shuddered again, and signed. He had signed without looking; and, without turning his head, pushed the paper obliquely towards his colleague, who signed it also. It went round the table. The angels who beheld that infamy covered their weeping eyes with their wings.

All the judges departed. Clement VIII. stepped down from his throne, walked towards the table, and put the fatal document in his breast like a poniard.

The night was dark when the judges returned through the lonely streets towards their dwellings. They exchanged not another word; they separated, detesting each other and themselves. They were afraid of any encounter. They shortly received the price of blood, all being promoted to higher offices and larger stipends. Not one felt the blush of Judas when that arch-traitor returned the money to the priest; not one felt remorse. They lived on, objects of flattery to those who needed their services, but of the silent contempt and abhorrence of all others. When they died the relatives of each bought an epitaph for a scudo, certifying that the body had belonged to a most incorruptible

magistrate—one who for many years had deserved well of mankind and of his country. The epitaph said nothing of the worm that preyed on his vitals. You could not see his torments, for he suffered in silence ; he never dared even to sigh, lest echo should thrust that sigh back into his throat. Those judges have now been all judged for centuries. Let us turn our eyes from their fate : such wretches are not worthy even of a malediction.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONFESSION.

WE have said that his Holiness placed the sentence in his breast like a poniard—he made use of it like an assassin. The murmurs of the people reached the Vatican like the howling of a tempest. He waits until the effervescence has subsided before carrying his immutable resolution into execution. A chance more propitious than he himself could have imagined soon offers the desired opportunity. Francesco Cenci was fatal to his family even after his death ; it would seem that he dragged them after him into a grave of blood.

His relative, Sta. Croce, of whom we spoke at the commencement of our horrible narrative, succeeded at last in executing his criminal purpose on Donna Costanza, his mother. The unfortunate lady was leaving Rome for Subiaco to restore her delicate health by the fresh air of the country, when Don Paolo, who had lain concealed on the road, stabbed her without mercy, and succeeded in escaping human justice. His miserable end, as related in the history of Novaes, affords an example of divine retribution even in this world.

This new crime created an immense sensation in Rome, and the Pope took advantage of it by displaying much rigour in other cases, but particularly in those of parricides, where he showed no mercy.

He gave strict orders for the arrest of Don Onofrio, Marquess dell'Orinolo, Don Paolo's brother, suspecting him of having been his accomplice. Nothing was ever found in his possession but a letter directed by the marquess to his brother, wherein he said, "If the misconduct of our mother should be as true as you state you must still conduct yourself as a cavalier." For this, however, he was condemned and executed. The Orsini, an influential and powerful house, who inherited the feuds of Orinolo, praised the salutary vigour of his Holiness, and persuaded many nobles and adherents of its necessity and justice. Those feuds devolving on the Orsini's, without further formalities, established a precedent by which the Aldobrandini's succeeded in engulfing the whole of the Cenci property.

Rumours of all kinds were put in circulation to alarm the people. It was said that no father or mother was safe—that all ties of nature were dissolved—that there was danger in procreating children—that it was no longer safe to keep them in the house. These rumours, based on the general consternation, took a thousand shapes, even the grotesque; for Father Zanobi, the instructor of the novices at the college of the Jesuits, used to affirm "that in our days a poor parent ran the risk of falling asleep alive and waking murdered."

Every evening crowds were collected round the prison of Beatrice. She herself was alone with her sorrow—that did not abandon her. When we say, “Faithful as a dog,” we should say, “Faithful as sorrow.”

By this time Clement VIII. considered the moment favourable to weigh the anchor and spread the sails; so he sent for Monsignor Taverna, delivered the sentence to him, and said, “I give you the verdict of the Cenci’s; put it into execution with due despatch.” He left Rome immediately after for Monte Cavallo, to avoid molestations and importunate appeals for mercy.

We read in the extracts of the ancient papers of the fraternity of St. John, “Friday, September 10th, 1599, at eight o’clock in the evening, it became known that on the following morning several public executions were to take place at the Savella prison and at the Torre di Nona, so we called the fraternity together and went to the above-mentioned prisons, where we were admitted to the presence of the condemned Giacomo and Bernardino Cenci, while another portion of our brotherhood went to the Ladies Beatrice Cenci and Lucretia Petroni.”

After two centuries and a half we consider it our duty to inform the living of the names of those who assisted in the horrible tragedy.

We describe them according to the extract from the register: “Was present at the prison of Torre di Nona, Giovanni Aldobrandini, Aurelio del Migliore, Camillo Moretti, Francesco Vai, Migliore Guidotti,” &c.

Beatrice sleeps in her cell, tormented by frightful dreams. It was thus she slept on the night when she was awakened by a death-rattle.

Oh! do not let us disturb her; let us only contemplate once more her heavenly beauty. Oh, may sleep continue! May it last for ever! It would be cruel to desire that she should open her bright eyes again to the light. Alas! light and sorrow are synonymous to her. Oh! could she but awake in the embrace of angels in the elysian fields—away, far away from the agonies of this bad world—what a mercy that would be to her! But the poor butterfly's wings are broken—it can fly no more! O that the angels would take it to their bosom!

She opens her eyes again to a fearful vision. Alas! the fibres of her heart must break. She will have to suffer still more agonising tortures, and then she must die: it is the will of God. What are her thoughts now? Her eyebrows are contracted. Her lover? Perhaps the dreadful frenzy of her father? or does she behold the glaring instrument inflicting the death-blow? Perchance she remembers the taxillo. But hush! she is going to speak: "O Lord in heaven, I have done no wrong!" She lifts her arms—the sound of her chains strikes her ears acutely—the noise produces an echo in her lonely prison—she shudders. Suddenly she perceives a dark form, bearing a resemblance to her brother Giacomo. It walks towards her; it says, "Rise! it is time." She asks, "Whither must I go?" The spectre bends down as if to whisper something, and lo! his

head falls off. She starts up with a piercing shriek, and strains her eyeballs to discover the reality—there is nothing. The light is still burning before the Madonna, and a profound silence prevails; but in a corner of her prison two men are kneeling and praying silently. Presently she hears a step, then another; she sees a shade, and the aspect of a venerable Capuchin, emaciated by fasting and old age. Her languid looks rest on his pale face—she cannot speak. The old man lifts his hands in benediction, and mutters a prayer to exorcise evil spirits. She allows him to finish, and then observes mildly, "Father, evil spirits have never been with me."

"Perhaps so, my daughter; but the evil one is always on the watch for us, so we must be prepared to sustain his assault. Come to the tribunal of repentance, my child; I am here to listen to you."

"To-morrow," implored Beatrice.

"To-morrow? Why postpone for to-morrow what we can do to-day? Are we masters of to-morrow?"

"Thus unprepared, father? overtaken suddenly, and just awakened from a frightful dream?"

"Does death assign the hour? does it not overtake us like a robber in the darkness? The Lord has said . . ."

At that moment the prison door was thrown open, and gave entrance to the substitute of the fiscal procurator, the bailiffs, and Signor Ventura, escorted by torch-bearers. Signor Ventura began thus:—

"Gentle lady, if by postponing my message I could alter

it I would do so willingly ; but my painful duty compels me to read the sentence”

“ Of death ? ” cried Beatrice.

The Capuchin covered his face with both his hands. She grasped the old man’s cloak in convulsions and exclaimed, “ Alas, alas ! to die so young. I have hardly seen the world yet, and men drive me out of it already ! What wrong have I done ? Life ! Do you know what life is at sixteen years of age ? ”

“ Life,” said the Capuchin, “ is a burden that grows heavier with our years. Happy are they to whom the Lord grants the mercy of His presence thus early ! What do you find, my child, in your past life to make you desirous of prolonging it ? ”

“ Nothing,” answered Beatrice quickly, “ nothing ! ” Then, struck by a thought that presented itself more brightly, she added, with humility, “ Nothing.”

“ Courage, then, my daughter. Let us leave this table ; the viands are ashes, and tears are the beverage.”

“ But the manner of leaving the table, my father, the manner ! Merciful God ! ”

“ Providence prepares a thousand ways for us to depart, and the speediest is the best ; but all are equally blessed if they lead to paradise.”

“ But, father, to die with infamy and disgrace on my name ! ”

“ These are thoughts of the dust, my daughter. Before the justice of God what is the justice of man ? On the

shore of the ocean of eternity years are but as grains of sand. Turn your looks to heaven, my child, and forget all earthly things."

"O death, death!" she murmured convulsively, and then fainted. Virginia called for assistance, but Beatrice needed none. She recovered, and said calmly, "It is past. Forgive me, signori; it was a moment of weakness. You may proceed now; I will listen."

Signor Ventura read the sentence in a monotonous tone, without omitting a clause or an item. When he had finished reading he looked at Beatrice, and was preparing a little speech of his own in favour of patience and such-like; but, seeing her so calm and resigned, he saved himself the trouble, made a low bow, and went to perform the same office with the other prisoners, reserving his speech for them, as likely to be more in need of it.

"Virginia," said Beatrice, taking the girl by the hand, "pray retire. Time you see presses with me; to-morrow . . . I should wish to confess myself before I die, and prepare my soul. Go, my sister; I will recall you presently."

Virginia left her, weeping bitterly.

The torches that lighted the officials had revealed to Beatrice's sight another Capuchin, who was kneeling and praying at the corner of the prison, motionless as a statue. Who is he? Why does he remain? Who presumes to listen to the secrets of heaven? Confession is to be heard by one man only; if by more it is a sacrilege. She

hesitates and keeps silence; Beatrice gazed at them alternately, and was at a loss to penetrate the mystery.

That prostrate Capuchin was Guido Guerra, her broken-hearted lover. Why came he at that solemn hour? Why should he embitter her last moments? No hatred has ever been more fatal than his love. Let him depart. What does he seek to know? That she loves him still? To what purpose? Oh, in mercy let her die in peace! Guido had penetrated into her prison, doubtful of the rectitude of his purpose, but determined to brave all risks to touch her hand once more, or lay his head by the side of hers and share her fate. He rose, advanced a few steps, staggered against the wall, and shed a torrent of tears, which Beatrice felt drop into her very heart. "Who weeps thus?" she asked. "I thought that this place contained no one more miserable than myself." Her words sounded like a harmony from heaven on Guido's ears; they overpowered him. Silent and trembling he approached; she recognised him, and drew back in alarm. Neither the desolate lover nor the suffering object of his adoration was able to speak; nothing was audible in that silence of despair but the rustling of her chains, agitated by the convulsive beating of her pulse. A flood of tears came to her relief.

The old Capuchin, seeing their emotion and wretchedness, addressed them: "My children, remain silent; a word spoken out of season would cost the life of Guido, and bring disgrace on myself. You are joined in holy matrimony.

Hearts united by the Lord may be severed, but not dissolved by man. You must separate now ; you must not bring shame on my grey hair in requital of my kindness."

Guido bent his head and kissed the iron fetter that confined her arm, and in so doing perceived the golden ring that he had sent her by Farinaccio.

The Capuchin adjusted the cowl over Guido's head and dragged him senseless towards the door, where he informed the turnkey that the sight of the young lady's misery had affected his nerves. Beatrice looked involuntarily at the iron fetter, and, seeing a tear on it, exclaimed, "This is my husband's wedding present !"

When the Capuchin returned she asked, with apparent calmness, "Whither has he gone ?"

"To our convent. He is indeed wretched. He does not always live at the convent ; but often in the middle of the night we hear a slight knock at the gate, and we admit him. We conceal him out of mercy and gratitude, in consequence of the many donations which he and his ancestors have bestowed on the fraternity. He never asks for meals, nor will he take any rest, but repairs to the church, where he kneels down before the main altar, and passes the long, long nights on the cold stones. His misery is great indeed. His very enemies would pity him."

"But tell me, father, where does he conceal himself during the day ? When you see him again tell him, I implore you, tell him to leave Rome. None but implacable men dwell here ; its air is fatal—I know it, alas !"

"I will deliver your message."

"But should he hesitate say that it is my request."

"It shall be done, my daughter; but it is time now to turn your thoughts towards heaven. Prostrate yourself to the earth: the greater your humiliation here, the higher you will be exalted hereafter. Repentance is twin sister to mercy: whenever they present themselves at the throne of God justice lays down her sword."

Beatrice knelt down, and opened her inmost soul to her confessor, detailing many slight faults and trivial transgressions, which, being treated by her as grave offences, only served to show the innocence of her gentle heart. Of the parricide she had not yet accused herself. The Capuchin, experienced in human passions, attributed her silence to shame and excessive contrition; so he hinted adroitly that she should confess all her transgressions without reserve, to which she ingenuously replied, "As far as I can remember them I have confessed all my faults. For any sins that I may have involuntarily committed may the Heavenly Father be merciful to me!"

"Search still deeper," the Capuchin persisted.

Beatrice meditated for some time. Her long silence surprised the confessor, and made him put an uncharitable construction upon it. At last he asked in a severe tone, "Who was it, then, that slew Francesco Cenci?"

"Father, I am not called on to confess the sins of others."

These words were pronounced with so much candour that the Capuchin appeared amazed, and repeated, "Did you not kill him?"

"No, father, I did not kill him."

"How is it, then, that you have accused yourself of that crime?"

"Father, I have suffered torments so agonising that the recollection makes my blood freeze. Still I was determined to expire under torture rather than perjure myself; but the prayers of my relatives, friends, and counsel prevailed on me to plead guilty to that deed, as, according to their belief, I should save my mother and brothers by so doing. The counsel, moreover, assured me that it would be an easy matter for him to obtain my acquittal on account of the horrible attempt of my father. I was not thoroughly convinced by their reasoning, nor would their prayers have conquered my firm resolution, but I considered it presumptuous to oppose my arguments to theirs; so I bowed my head, and offered them the sacrifice of my life and fair fame. I felt that I was ruining myself. Facts, alas! have proved that my anticipations were correct. It pleased God that it should be so, and so let it be. I have done my best to save those who are dear to me, and who are innocent like myself."

"You affirmed your guilt on oath, my daughter."

"The counsel persuaded me by affirming that it was no sin, either before divine or human laws, to defend one's own life by taking away that of another, and that much

less could it offend the Creator to protect it by swearing to what was false; so I swore”

“Oh, the sophists—the impious sophists!” exclaimed the Capuchin. “Who ever preached that perdition lies in the truth?”

“Such were my thoughts, father; but Farinaccio, the counsel, urged me to trust entirely to his guidance; and such is his reputation for talent, that I thought it preposterous to follow my own inclination and inward suggestions rather than his advice and experience.”

“Who recommended him to you?”

“Guido sent him to me with this ring—the ring that was to be blessed at our marriage.”

At this reply her face and neck were suffused with a crimson blush.

“Tell me the whole occurrence, my daughter. Perhaps you have sinned more than you believe.”

Beatrice related all the circumstances without omitting the minutest particulars. The holy man, at first incredulous, was gradually compelled to put faith in the ingenuousness of her words, and in the candour and serenity of her heavenly countenance. Striking his forehead with his hand, he exclaimed, “O Lord God! was there ever a more sainted being in this world below?” Then turning to her, he pronounced the following words with much solemnity: “Blessed maiden! I hereby absolve you, and protest that it is I that should kneel to you, to crave your intercession with the Lord for me; for no prayers can be more gratify-

ing to Him than those which proceed from such pure and innocent lips. I will unite my supplications to yours, and they will ascend to heaven. I shall no longer pray for you—you need not the prayers of mortals; but I will pray for this wretched city, and for the salvation of those who have condemned you to death.”

Beatrice threw herself once more before the sacred image of the Madonna to thank God for having recalled her so soon from this world, and for having permitted her to see once again the beloved face of her Guido, who, not being destined to become her companion on earth, would be united to her for ever in paradise. Here she turned round abruptly, as if struck by a sudden thought.

“Tell me, father, tell me in mercy, will my Guido be forgiven? will he be worthy of eternal salvation? will it be granted to me to touch the hand that shed the blood of my father?”

“Do you think, my daughter, that we can enjoy the blessings of paradise if we do not forget our earthly passions?”

Beatrice sighed deeply and said, almost in a whisper, “Still I could have wished to remember my love, although so fraught with sorrow and misery.”

Again she prayed fervently; and the old man knelt down by her side, and implored of the Madonna that God would grant courage and constancy to the poor sufferer in her latest moments.

A Brother of Mercy now entered the cell and whispered

something to the Capuchin, who turned round to Beatrice and said, "My daughter, if you desire to see your mother it will be permitted."

"O yes!" said Beatrice; "let her come. Poor dear mother! I will try to console her."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TOILET.

THE mother and daughter threw themselves into each other's arms. The hand shrinks from describing the pangs of that interview, and trembles at the task of recording what they still have to suffer. After exhausting themselves in tears and mutual embraces they became more tranquil. Beatrice, on perceiving the fine silk dress of Donna Lucretia, looked at her own, and discovered, to her great surprise, that, without knowing it, she also wore that embroidered green silk dress so prized by her in better days, because she wore it on the day when Guido first saw her. She remembered his having frequently told her afterwards that, in his enthusiasm for the poetry of Petrarca, he fancied he saw in her another youthful Laura. But this was not a moment to dwell on similar recollections, so she dismissed them from her mind, and began to consider the impropriety of going to the scaffold in such gay attire. "Mother," she said, with a smile, "when we women enter on life's voyage our censors say that we take with us a large stock of vanity, and that we would rather allow our vessel to sink than throw away our cargo. They

are not quite wrong it seems, because we women can correct ourselves of other faults, but of our vanity never."

"Beatrice, I do not understand you; such things are too abstruse for me."

"A look at your dress will explain it, dear mother."

"Holy Madonna!" exclaimed Donna Lucretia, "have I lost my senses?"

Beatrice remarked, with much decorum, "To show ourselves thus would almost look like bravado on our part, which would assuredly be far from our thoughts. We meet death and we submit to it with resignation, because it is the will of God. Is it not so, mother?"

"You speak like that good and wise girl I have always known you to be, my Beatrice."

"Come, Virginia, you must procure for us some sort of stuff to make two cloaks for me and for my lady mother; also two cords and two veils . . . Virginia, why do you not answer?"

Poor Virginia felt a weight on her chest that oppressed her utterance; she burst into tears and said, after a long pause, "I have several such stuffs. My father brought them to me from different fairs, but I would never have them made up in dresses, because it is better for me not to be remarked or known. Shall I bring them?"

"By all means, Virginia, bring them. I shall leave you wherewith to buy others. But what shall we do for cords?"

"My father will provide them for you."

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his mind to starve himself, when, partially recovering from his malady through his abstinence, he still refused to live on, observing to his friends that, having gone so far, it was not worth while to recede."

"Why, then," asked Donna Lucretia, "do we feel within us so strong an instinct to live?"

Beatrice replied, "This is, in my opinion, a wise dispensation of Providence; for mankind, no longer deterred by the fear of death, would be so strongly and so often tempted to get rid of life, that the object of the creation would be annulled. Death comes upon us as sleep comes to a weary traveller who sighs for repose—or as on the persecuted who pants for tranquillity."

Here Virginia asked, "Instead of making death so frightful, would it not have been better to have made life less dreary?"

Beatrice looked her full in the face, and then replied, "Our intellect, my dear Virginia, cannot comprehend the reasons of everything; but where it fails us we must have recourse to faith, and by its aid we reach paradise."

"Oh! why could they not content themselves with my head?" sobbed poor Donna Lucretia again. "I am old now: I had but little time to remain in this world; but you, Giacomo, and the dear boy—alas, alas!" and her tears fell more copiously than before. Her emotion was so strong that Beatrice almost gave way; but the moon suddenly piercing through the aperture of her prison, and shining full on the image of the Madonna, caused her to

exclaim, "Behold, mother, the star of all tempests, the source of all spiritual good! We are already approaching the portals of eternity."

All three arose, and, as if moved by the same spirit, threw themselves down before the image, like young cygnets under the wing of their mother when terrified by a flash of lightning. There they obtained comfort, and then resumed their melancholy work.

The last morning which they were destined to pass on earth was ushered in by a gorgeous sunrise, which promised a golden day.

Their first visitor was one of Maestro Alessandro's assistants, a youth of a harsh expression of countenance. He held a razor in his hand, and stared at Beatrice.

Struck with an idea that perhaps the Pope had altered his mind concerning a public execution, she shuddered, but recovered presently and asked, "What is your purpose? We are prepared for everything."

He hesitated, and then said, "My lady, it is customary . . . you know . . . the hair . . ."

"The hair!" she cried, raising her hand to take out the comb, which made her rich tresses fall over her person, pouring down her side like a stream of gold. "Here is my hair—what do you want with it? Oh! I see; the axe has its rights—the right of not being impeded in its stroke. I understand; make haste—cut it off."

It was done, and the locks fell on the ground. Beatrice contemplated them for a moment—a tear moistened her

eye in spite of herself. No infliction had as yet so deeply affected her, for none had been so fraught with humiliation. Were they even now to grant her life, how could she reappear amongst the young maidens, her companions, with her hair severed by the executioner? She bent down, collected the locks, and addressed them thus: "Oh! companions of all my misery, I had hoped that you would have accompanied me to the grave. Such has not been the will of Providence; but, as you were born and nurtured on my innocent head, you must not become the instruments of deceit, or something worse. Besides, you would bring misery to any one that would make use of you. Everything about me is fatal. Better, then, that you should disappear like myself in the elements to which we belong. Let, then, our particles evaporate in the immensity of space." So saying, she cast the tresses into the fire, which soon converted them into a heap of white ashes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE APOSTOLIC PARDON.

"Onde tanta pieta in voi alligna
Sacerdoti crudeli?"

ALFIERI.

FATHER ANGELICO, the Capuchin, was still on his knees praying before the Madonna, when Beatrice walked slowly towards him, laid her hand on his shoulder, and said, "Father, would you kindly call the Brothers of Mercy? I wish to intrust them and you with a last request."

"Willingly, my child," he replied; and, rising, he went to fetch them. On his return with the brothers Beatrice addressed them thus:—

"Brothers in Christ, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your pious office, and may the Lord reward you according to your merits! I stand in need of still greater assistance than you are in the habit of bestowing, and I supplicate both you and this holy man not to consider my request as indiscreet. I have made my will through a notary; but I entertain misgivings that the tribunal will throw some obstacle in the way of my last bequests. I therefore beg of you to exert all your influence to get my wishes fulfilled respecting the distribution of my

dower. You will also have two hundred masses celebrated for me, for which purpose you will be pleased to accept these forty-five ducats : if more are required you will apply to my guardian, Signor Scartesio, who will make good the deficiency. I desire also that Andrea, Ludovico, and Ascanio, the three soldiers who have shown much humanity towards me since my imprisonment, may be handsomely remunerated. Thus they will find that mercy to the unfortunate, sure of its reward in heaven, sometimes finds it in this world also ; and they will then continue to practise humanity towards all who may follow me into this abode of misery. I also beg of you to repay Cardinal Bentinoro the forty ducats which he lent to me ; and I desire to leave all my dresses, linen, and trinkets, exclusive of what I have bequeathed in my will, to Virginia, the daughter of Maestro Alessandro, who has shown me such sisterly affection during my days of tribulation, and who has served me with such zeal and devotion. But where is she ? Ah, poor Virginia ! she has not strength to witness what I am doomed to undergo. Poor girl ! she is worthy of a better fate. I know not that I ought to wish to see her again. Should I see her no more, greet her tenderly from me, and tell her that I hope we shall embrace in paradise. When all is over, you will bury me in St. Pietro in Montorio, on that mound which is first saluted by the beams of the rising sun. Although the dead cannot feel his heat or see his rays, still it is a consolation for the dying that their grave will be visited by the heavenly luminary. On that spot

Tasso was buried four years past. It also contains the Transfiguration of Raphael. Their genius was as great as my misfortune. Love has been fatal to me. But enough of this. Forgive the idle words of a young girl, and remember me in your holy orisons."

Farinaccio was sleeping profoundly. He was dreaming of his eloquence, of promotions, and of a cardinal's hat. On a sudden he is awakened by the breaking of a window; a stone had been thrown into his bedroom, and he hears a voice in the street shouting:

"Woe! Farinaccio, while you sleep the Cenci's are being dragged to execution!"

He leaped from his bed and threw open the window. The day was just breaking, but he could see no one, and only heard the same voice repeating from a distance, "The Cenci's are dragged to the scaffold, and you sleep!"

Hurrying on his clothes, he throws himself into his carriage and flies to the prison of Corte Savella. The fatal news was there confirmed; and he made for the Quirinal, penetrated into the ante-room of the Pope, who had just returned from Monte Cavallo, and requested the chamberlain to procure him instant admission on a question of life and death.

"My good signor," said the chamberlain quietly, "I must inform you that his Holiness is in bed, and must not be disturbed."

At that moment a lackey presented himself with a cup of

chocolate, and went straight towards the Pope's dormitory. Farinaccio seized the opportunity to follow, and to throw himself at the feet of his Holiness, exclaiming :

"Holy father, I supplicate you on my knees to hear me."

"Rise."

"No, holy father; leave me thus with my head in the dust. There must the man remain who supplicates in despair—whose heart is torn by indescribable anguish. A scream—a terrible and sinister scream—has awakened me : 'Woe, woe! You sleep, and the Cenci's are being dragged to execution.' The voice came from heaven or from the other place"

"How can you suppose it came from the other place? That is not the abode of truth."

"It was true, then? Oh, mercy, holy father, mercy! Mercy for all that innocent blood about to be spilled! From the days of its foundation Rome has never witnessed so frightful a tragedy."

"Innocent do you say? Did they not confess their crime?"

"*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* The Lord humbles me—the Lord gives me cause to weep day and night. Human intellect, in the presumption of its learning, must go distracted now. It was I, your Holiness, who persuaded that noble girl to confess a crime of which she was innocent. She was determined to die under torture rather than abandon the truth. It was I who combated that heroic resolution. It was I who promised

to save her and her relatives, provided she would plead guilty, trusting that the monstrous attempt of her father could not fail to secure her acquittal. She disputed the point with me, maintaining that the best defence of innocence was the pure and simple truth. Oh! those were holy words, inspired from above; but I implored her with all the force of my eloquence, whilst her relatives knelt and prayed round her couch of suffering; nor did we leave her until she had acquiesced. In this way I have brought ruin on that unfortunate child. Mercy, holy father! If she dies thus through my fault my desolate soul will despair of its future happiness."

"Do not distress yourself about that, Signor Farinaccio; the keys of paradise are in our keeping, and we shall easily find a way to get you admitted."

"But who can rescue me from my own conscience?"

"Your conscience!"

The tone of irony was not to be mistaken. Farinaccio looked the Pope full in the face, and beheld a visage of stone.

"My conscience tells me that I shall never know peace more."

"Bah! Believe me, I understand these matters better than you. I know you to be an able man, and very learned in your profession. You have fulfilled your task with talent, zeal, and perseverance. I pay you this tribute because you deserve it; but, as you do your duty, you must allow others to fulfil theirs."

"Undoubtedly, most holy father. It is your own sense of duty that must urge you to do justice, and that is the very cause that emboldens me to press it on your Holiness."

"Signor Farinaccio, we have respected the defence in you ; be pleased to respect the judge in us."

Farinaccio made another desperate effort, exclaiming, "Where justice cannot discriminate there is a wider field for mercy."

The Pope cut him short angrily with the stern words, "They must die."

"Oh ! they must ?" said Farinaccio, rising suddenly. "That alters the case. Forgive me, holy father, I was not aware of the necessity. I can now retire."

The Pope felt that he had said too much, and, endeavouring to mitigate the hasty words, added, "Must—certainly—although against my wish : the safety of society and the religion of the holy see compel us to shut our ears to mercy. You well know that in the first ages of Rome, in the days of paganism, there was no law against parricide ; but the wickedness of mankind increased in spite of our holy religion, and the severe punishment of the Pompeian law was considered too mild. Look to Spain, France, and England, and you will not find anywhere milder laws than our own. If simple homicide is punished with decapitation, it is but right that parricide should meet with a severer doom. Still, out of consideration for you, we will alter the sentence, and have the women beheaded instead of being quartered."

"And the little boy also? Your Holiness knows that he is not twelve years of age yet. I hardly mentioned him in the defence. I considered his age quite sufficient protection, but it seems I was mistaken likewise."

"He also has confessed," observed the Pope, "to have taken part in the crime."

"He only confessed to escape further tortures. He does not even know what parricide means, or what his confessions will lead to; besides, his release was promised to him as soon as he should have made the declaration. Once more I crave of you, holy father, to listen to the inward voice of mercy: one day we shall all require it."

Clement VIII. hesitated for some time, and then said, "I feel a compunction about Bernardino Cenci, and I will not allow you to leave me entirely disconsolate. We will extend our mercy to him. You may depart in peace now, and allow us to expedite the placet at once, lest it come too late."

Farinaccio felt as Jacob must have felt when the blood-stained garment of his son Joseph was presented to him. He had only been able to save one of the victims.

"*Ex ore leonis!*" he exclaimed; "our ancestors consecrated the remnant of the lamb saved from the wolf"—a simile that struck him still more forcibly when he discovered the kind of mercy vouchsafed to the child by Clement VIII.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PROCESSION.

"Mulier diligens est corona viro suo."

PROVERBS.

LOVE did not sleep—Guido had found means to obtain information of the sentence immediately after it had been signed. He went immediately in search of his new friends the carbonari, and gave directions that they should all come disguised that very night to Rome, and meet at the Flavian Amphitheatre. Most of them had reached the eternal city two hours before daybreak. Some were disguised as priests, monks, peasants, and gentlemen. There were only forty of them in all—too small a number for a rescue; but Guido and his confederates were not men to hesitate about that; he would have undertaken the task alone. They agreed to place a vine leaf in their hats as a sign of recognition. The plan was, to interrupt the procession when reaching the scaffold; there to fall with naked swords upon the Brothers of Mercy, the sbirri, and the soldiers; then, taking advantage of the panic, to rescue Beatrice, and make for Tivoli on horseback.

The carbonari agreed to his arrangement, being well

aware of the extraordinary interest felt by all Rome for the unfortunate girl, and also because Guido had promised them a royal reward.

We find recorded in the memorials of those days that, by an extraordinary coincidence, another party had meditated and undertaken the same hazardous enterprise, instigated, as some supposed, by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini. This suspicion gathered confirmation from the deep interest he took in the Cenci family; from the manner in which he obtained the portrait of Beatrice; and, above all, from his relationship and intimacy with Guerra. Had they acted conjointly the two bands might possibly have succeeded.

The second band was chiefly composed of young artists, who, as we know, are easily influenced by moral or physical beauty. Some of the other young conspirators belonged to the best families in Rome, who, from relationship and other affinities, felt deeply outraged by the criminal violence committed against the Cenci family. Tradition informs us that the most conspicuous amongst them was Ubaldo Ubaldini, a young Florentine painter of great promise, who unfortunately perished in the affray. Some people maintain to this day that the original sketch of the celebrated Barberini portrait was taken by this artist, Guido Reni not having visited Rome before the end of 1599.

"Per Giove tonante!" shouted Ubaldini to his companions, and giving a tremendous blow on the table with his fist; "she must not die! It would be better to smash the Apollo or the Laocoon."

"And the whole Vatican into the bargain," added another.

"Certainly," observed petulantly a young French sculptor, "because we can reproduce these works; but . . ."

"No, Mister Frenchman from France," retorted Ubaldini, "we cannot create such marvels again; but better all perish than that innocent heroine."

"The priests! Oh, the priests!" exclaimed a half-starved Neapolitan painter.

"Now, if Beatrice had been like you, my friend of Naples, she would not be in such a predicament."

"But why, Ubaldo, how?"

"Because they are murdering her simply to get her money."

"Silence, you fellows! The beauty to whom we devote our lives is pure, heavenly, and heroic. All jesting is mistimed. Let us rather inspire each other with magnanimous resolve."

These last words were pronounced with much solemnity, and put an end at once to all frivolous altercation and banter. The jovial, light-hearted youths became as serious as the fathers of the Council of Trent. They were more numerous than Guido's band, but no less determined, although the outlaws were accustomed to all sorts of desperate enterprises.

Their sign of recognition was a white tassel.

The first rays of the sun that fell upon Rome that morning illuminated a melancholy scene at the Torre di

Nona. It was there that Giacomo and Bernardino rushed into each other's arms.

"Come, darling, come to my heart! Let me fancy that I kiss my children! Happy Bernardino, you have no children! You only feel half the agony of death. Alas, alas! my children orphans! sons of a parricide! persecuted by a wicked man, whose will is law, and who is determined to have their property. To please that powerful bad man every one pretends to look on us as criminals, thus doing violence to his conscience. Where are all our friends? They have become enemies, and will make my children suffer for the disgrace of having known their father. They will not assist them when they are starving. Their mother, my poor desolate Luisa, will not abandon them I know. Poor things! they will be robbed of everything."

"Giacomo, can I not leave them what I have?" asked Bernardino. "I know nothing of this dreadful business. I told the father confessor so just now, but he would not believe me, and then they came to fetch me."

"Who knows better than I how innocent you are, my own dear Bernardino? But you are going to leave this wicked world for heavenly bliss."

"But tell me, Giacomo, why did we accuse ourselves of having killed him? I kill my father! Why, his very looks frightened me out of my senses. I am but a boy; but I knew very well that they would have tormented us to death with their horrible instruments if we had gone on

denying, so I thought, by confessing what they wanted me to confess, they would at any rate kill us with one blow. Tell me, Giacomo—you have lived in the world—is justice always thus ?”

Giacomo sighed deeply, but did not reply.

“Listen, Giacomo, listen ! Do you hear that bell ring ?”

Giacomo hugged the child to his heart, and turned still paler when he said, “How do you feel, my brother ? Do you regret to die ?”

“I think I am sorry—yes ; I like the birds, and I like to look at the Tiber when it is swollen ; and I like the butterflies, and the flowers around which they play : I like everything. I see the sun here—he is so bright and so warm. There I fear cold and darkness. Here I know where I am ; but where I am to go to they only tell me. It may be so ; but is it certain ?”

“Bernardino, I will tell you : that bell is tolling our knell. While we are still full of life it tells us that we must depart.”

As if to confirm his words the Brothers of Mercy and the father confessor came to join them, saying, “Brothers, courage ; the hour is at hand.”

“Let the will of God be done,” replied Giacomo meekly, while Bernardino looked him full in the face, and asked him innocently, “Is it really the will of God ?”

“Certainly, my dear,” said the confessor, “because nothing happens but by the will of God, and if you doubt you commit a serious sin, my child.”

"Well, then, I repent, father; and I will believe that, on purpose to get to paradise, it is the will of God that I am to die, although innocent."

"Who amongst us is without sin? We are all sinners in the eyes of God."

"Yes," said the boy, "but we are not all of us led to execution at twelve years of age."

"The Lord chastises those He loveth; and you, my child, must be thankful to have been elected amongst thousands to experience His infinite wisdom and goodness."

"Father," said the child ingenuously, "would you like to take my place?"

The friar lifted his eyes towards heaven, and replied with compunction, "With all my heart, my child, if it could be done."

Further intercourse was interrupted by the appearance of the executioner. The sternness and ferocity of Maestro Alessandro's bronze features had melted into an expression of deep sorrow. The prisoners were slowly marched out. At the threshold of the prison Giacomo stopped suddenly and exclaimed, with ineffable pathos,—

"Cursed a thousand times be the man who condemns his fellow man to despair of his soul—who pushes his fellow being into the grave. Let him be cursed seven times only!"

The bells continued tolling and the drums beating discordantly. Heaven and earth seemed to grow darker by that judicial massacre. The troops were in array; all the sbirri

were on the alert, and the executioner with his assistants stood prepared.

Bernardino's curiosity was particularly attracted by two carts, on which there were little furnaces of burning coals heating several iron pincers. He asked his brother in a bewildered, childlike manner, "Tell me, what are those pincers for?"

Giacomo could not answer him. Most of the Brothers of Mercy were weeping. The boy became alarmed, and insisted, "I want to know it. Tell me, Giacomo; I am not afraid—I know I must die."

"They are for us," stuttered Giacomo, and could say no more.

"Oh!" exclaimed the child, "I did not think that so many instruments were required for me. Only look at my neck; it is as thin as a reed; it will cause no trouble to the executioner."

The Brothers of Mercy, that they might prevent the boy's attention wandering from religious meditations, put a little box of light wood called tavolette over his head.

The child cried to have it removed; he wanted to see the sun once more. Just at that moment there was a stir in the crowd, and a carriage was seen amongst the soldiers.

A storm of voices shouted "Mercy! mercy!"

A flash of hope passed across poor Giacomo's eyes.

Signor Ventura appeared opposite the condemned, and read from his carriage, "Don Bernardino Cenci, his

Holiness graciously spares your life. Be pleased to accompany your relatives, and pray to God for their souls."

Those exact words, "*be pleased*" (*compiacetevi*), are found in the chronicle of the times. We shall soon see what sort of mercy *Pope Clement* had granted. Had the archfiend himself been educated in the college of the Jesuits, he could not have employed language of more diabolical and malignant hypocrisy.

The tavolette was immediately taken off the boy's head, and the executioner released him from his handcuffs.

Bernardino jumped for joy at recovering his freedom ; but immediately remembering that he had other causes of grief, he checked himself, and fell at Giacomo's feet, asking for pardon. The shadow of death followed the flash of hope with the miserable man ; his eyes were glassy and his face convulsed ; but he made an effort to lift his little brother, and said, " Be merry, my dear Bernardino. If you could see my heart you would find that I am more delighted than you. The Lord is no longer implacable against me, since He deigns to provide another father for my poor children. Take them under your protection, my own dear brother. I commend to you my own flesh and blood, as I commend my soul to my Creator."

"Giacomo," said Bernardino, "I will fulfil the sacred duty you impose upon me."

"The Lord be praised !" exclaimed Giacomo, embracing him.

The executioner now approached, took the cloak off Giacomo's shoulders, leaving his body bare to the hips; and then, applying the heated pincers, he tore large pieces of flesh from his shuddering limbs. The iron was smoking, and horrible wounds were inflicted. Bernardino, in a frenzy, jumped on his legs, and tried to seize the burning iron with his little hands; but, finding his efforts frustrated, he threw himself on his knees again, and begged with his hands joined, "For mercy's sake, do not touch him any more! Enough Too much . . . Here, take me."

Maestro Alessandro paid no attention to his entreaties and tears, so the child addressed himself to the Brothers of Mercy: "Quick, signori, quick—put the box on my head again! Oh, oh! my heart is bursting!" He had fainted.

By this time the awful procession had reached the Campo di Fiore, the piazza where the inquisition was accustomed to celebrate its *auto da fés*, situated near the paternal mansion of the Cenci.

Giacomo, bewildered with pain, no longer knew or cared where he was until he heard a piercing shriek proceeding from the church of St. Tomaso dei Cenci. He descried his frantic wife and miserable children.

To be seen thus by his family brought all his blood to his heart. He almost fainted; but tenderness conquering all other feelings, he exclaimed, "My children! Oh, my children! Give me my children!"

Threatening murmurs arose among the excited crowd, "Give him his children!" The officials considered it prudent to comply, and the unfortunate man was allowed to embrace his children for the last time.

Luisa had fallen senseless on the threshold of the church. Not one of the many servants, not one of the many friends of the family was there to support her in her wretchedness. Angiolina, her only friend, ran to a neighbour's shop for help. She could only find an aged Jew of the name of Jacob who would offer his services: he kept an old clothes' shop in the Ghetto, close to the palace. She felt some reluctance at first to accept his offer, because in those days a Hebrew was considered inferior to a dog; but necessity compelled her to employ him. Old Jacob, seeing her hesitate, said, "Come, my good woman, the Lord in His anger has visited this house. All the wretched are brethren. We also are born to suffer and to die. Your people curse us; but we have a heart within us. If I can do anything for you command me."

Jacob carried Donna Luisa to her house and departed.

When she recovered she addressed her weeping children thus:—

"We shall never see him again! We shall soon be houseless, my children! We have lost all—father, relatives, friends, good name, and property. Forget what you have been, and remember what you are. When a friend of your father pretends not to know you, do not be offended. Our servants have left us—pity them; for their object is food,

and you have none to give. The sons of the nobles will scorn you : let them pass. The sons of the people will avoid you : bring them back to you by your affection. Everybody's hand will be against you : never lift your hand against anybody ; above all, never blame your father. He was wretched from suffering, but not from guilt ; but even had he been guilty, children must not condemn their parents. Besides, I affirm, I swear it to you, he was miserable but innocent. Pray to the Lord that He may soon take us to meet him in heaven ; for, alas ! we can meet him no more on earth."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE EXECUTION.

"Il bellissimo collo al ferro offerse."

MASSINI.

AFTER traversing many other streets the procession of the sufferers at last reached the Via Julia, where it stopped before the prison of Corte Savella. There, at the foot of a crucifix, Beatrice and Lucretia were praying in silence: with them was Father Angelico, the Capuchin. Presently a rumour was heard, gradually coming nearer and nearer. The holy Capuchin looked through the gate of the prison, and saw a hand making a signal, by which he understood that the fatal hour was come. He is at a loss how to announce it: the audible prayers of Beatrice afford him the opportunity.

"Almighty Father!" she sobbed, "forgive me if it be a sin to wish to abandon life, and to sigh for the protection of Thy blessed presence. I feel like an exile whose heart exults at the prospect of returning home; and heaven is the only home for suffering mortals."

"My daughter, the Lord has come to fetch you: let us hurry to meet Him," ejaculated the Capuchin, offering her his withered hand.

"Here below," exclaimed Beatrice, "suffering is martyrdom ; above it is glory. Let us go."

At that solemn moment of inspiration and religious fervour the beauty of her angelic features, wasted but not obliterated by acute suffering, seemed to revive in all its pristine splendour. Even that simple white dress became her.

"Here she is ! Here she is !" was buzzed all around as soon as she left the prison gate.

The Brothers of Mercy hurried towards her, and lowered a colossal crucifix covered by a black veil.

Both women knelt down before it, and said in a loud voice, "Thou comest, O Lord, to meet us ! Deign to receive us with the same affection that we feel in coming to Thee !"

Giacomo and Bernardino jumped from their cart before they could be prevented, and threw themselves at her feet, crying, "Forgive us, sister ! it is our fault. We persuaded you to confess, and now you are dragged to death, although innocent !"

Beatrice shuddered when she saw the horrible state of her brother Giacomo. She leaned on the Capuchin's arm for support, when, recovering, she said with a serene smile, "Forgive you what, my own dear brothers ? Neither your confession nor mine is the cause of our deaths—it is our property and estates : do you not yet know that ? I am willing enough to exchange this world of tigers with human faces for an abode where there is no oppressor

and no oppressed. Courage, Giacomo! By this time your sufferings can be but of a short duration. Let us hurry towards our Creator. He is waiting for us; eternal blessing awaits us, and eternal peace."

When the two brothers were forced back to their cart their hearts were comforted by her inspired words.

The procession was resumed. The step of Beatrice was slow but firm. Not so that of her mother, whose limbs repeatedly failed her. Before every church—and there are many in Rome—they knelt down and prayed devoutly. A spectacle of so much faith and resignation had not been often witnessed. One of the masked Brothers of Mercy, feeling much annoyed at Beatrice's repeated protestations of innocence, shook his head in anger, and had the temerity to whisper to her,—

"Your protestations of innocence deceive not the justice of man, much less that of God."

Beatrice felt the outrage, although her thoughts were in heaven. She replied calmly, "It is indeed because I address myself to the omniscient God that I speak the truth."

"But you have confessed when released from the torture," continued her interlocutor.

"I was persuaded to do so, to save those I love. If that confession had been the cause of my death, I should repent it as a serious sin; but our death was settled long before the trial began. We were delivered to our judges, not to be judged, but to be slaughtered. It would have

been more merciful to have consigned us at once to the executioner."

"But I tell you that you are guilty," whispered the mysterious brother, "and the gate of salvation will be closed unless you humble yourself and confirm your confession *coram populo*."

"Are these the consolations of religion? Are Luciani's torments to recommence? My salvation does not depend upon you, nor upon any other mortal," proudly exclaimed Beatrice.

"You must confess publicly and declare your guilt . . ."

Before the sentence was finished an immense flower-pot fell upon his head from a high balcony either by accident or design. The blow fractured his skull, and felled him to the ground. The brothers hurried to assist him, opened his cowl, and discovered Giovanni Aldobrandini, the Pope's nephew, who had accompanied the victims to witness the massacre—a massacre which indeed took place, though he lived not to see it.

On reaching the bridge leading to the Castle of St. Angelo a sudden stoppage occurred; the procession was interrupted; screams of terror were heard, and the crowd was seen rushing in all directions for safety. A handful of men with vine leaves on their hats were seen penetrating the dense masses of spectators, dealing stabs in every direction, and clearing their road in close and compact order.

The panic was contagious; the cavalry was hemmed in, and could not manœuvre or advance; and the sbirri began

to disperse clandestinely, aware of the general hatred they inspired. All was confusion and terror. Guido was seen on horseback animating his companions, who drew nearer and nearer, carrying everything before them. They had already seized Beatrice. "She is saved!" cried the multitude, with an explosion of delight, while many offered assistance to the ravishers. Unfortunately the fall of a balcony overloaded with spectators had frightened Guido's charger, which became unmanageable, plunged, kicked, and ran away with its distracted rider.

At that moment another rush of a panic-stricken mob came from the opposite direction; they were driven like cattle by a band of armed men, who wore white tassels on their caps, and who pierced their way through the crowd by dealing blows with their cutlasses strong enough to fell elephants. They were led by young Ubaldini, who saw and understood the object of the rival band, but could not get near enough to act in concert. Still he advanced to address them, when in the scuffle and confusion he received a blow that laid him prostrate in the dust. A charge of cavalry from the Transteverine quarter put his companions to flight.

Beatrice had seen her Guido for the last time. Guido had seen her. What were their sensations? A glance of love on the very threshold of death—a glance that seemed to express, "Guido, my own beloved! repent, and the Lord will soon unite us in heaven." Father Angelico stood terrified, and cursed the evil spirit who had inspired her

again with worldly thoughts. He besought her once more to fix her whole mind on heaven, to banish all terrestrial weakness, and not to turn back when on the eve of eternity.

Beatrice replied, "I am but a poor sinning woman. You are a holy man; but I assure you that I commit no sin in thinking of my love once more, as I shall be married to my Guido in paradise shortly. Love is heaven, and heaven is love."

The Capuchin was not quite convinced by that sort of theology, but thinking that the time for controversy was not opportune, he continued to offer spiritual consolation, and ascended the scaffold by her side.

When the Brothers of Mercy urged Bernardino to follow the poor child cried, "O God! O God! how many deaths am I to die?" And he fainted for the second time. The last words of Donna Lucretia were addressed to Beatrice before the frightful work commenced. "My beloved daughter, I am going to lead you the way to heaven." Presently a shock was felt on the scaffold, a heavy blow had been struck, and the headsman shouted,—

"This is the head of Donna Lucretia Petroni Cenci."

Beatrice knelt down by the side of her little brother Bernardino, who was gasping for breath; she imprinted a kiss on his brow, and then addressed the following words to seven young girls, attired in white, who had been allowed to attend her to the scaffold: "Sisters, may the Lord reward you for your pious attention to me! I have left you



posterity. The executioner tied his legs to iron rings fixed for the purpose, and threw him down as the butcher throws an ox ; he then hammered him to death, tore out his palpitating heart, and showed it to the public, exclaiming,—

“ This is the heart of Giacomo Cenci ! ”

Bernardino lingered for some time, and only recovered partially. It was soon manifest to everybody that his reprieve was a more cruel punishment than that inflicted on his relations.

The placet of the Pope said, “ Mercy on Don Bernardino. His sentence of death is commuted to the galleys *in perpetuo*, on condition that he *be pleased* to witness the execution of his relatives.”

The reasoning of the Pope was as follows :—“ The boy will expire at the sight of those horrors, and we shall obtain the property and the merit of having shown mercy into the bargain, or his mind will withstand the shock, and the estates will be equally forfeited by sentencing him to the galleys for life.” Such was the clemency of Clement VIII.!

The pious maidens followed the mournful funeral towards the *saniculum* to the church of St. Pietro in Montorio. The streets were strewed with flowers by a sympathising multitude, who accompanied the body to its last resting-place.

Where are now the bones of Beatrice Cenci? We search in vain for her tomb—it has disappeared from the church.

The monks, like the good sons of Noah, anxious to

cover the shame of the pontiffs, have inverted the tombstone, turning the lower side uppermost. Infatuated men ! Different means are required to conceal the many impious sins of our modern Babylon.

Let the pious pilgrim kneel before the main altar of the church of St. Pietro in Montorio. There, *in cornu epistolæ*, on the left of the steps, lie the bones of our Beatrice, innocently condemned at sixteen years of age to an ignominious death by the vicar of Christ on earth.

The confiscated property of that unfortunate family has been the subject of litigation for more than two centuries. Within a period of forty years the cause has been again pleaded before the Roman tribunals, the parties being Count Bolognetti Cenci, *versus* Prince Borghese, Aldobrandini, and others.

Whenever the wealth of the condemned finds its way into the coffers of the judge, that judge is bound to give clear proofs to the world that he is not in league with the executioner.

THE END.

